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WILD WILL, THE MAD RANCHERO; OR, THE TERRIBLE TEXANS.

A Romance of Kit Carson, Jr., and Big
Foot Wallace's Long Trail.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM."
(MAJOR SAM S. HALL.)

CHAPTER I.

THE FRONTIER HOME.

TEXAS! bright, flowery land of the far sunny South!—land where the Lone Star flag waved over scenes of mad carnage, blood-stained prairies and chivalric deeds—deeds that live unrivaled in the history of States or nations.

Step by step, over gory trails, have thy brave sons driven their cruel foes—the painted savage and ruthless, revengeful Mexican—driven them

from thy green flower-bespangled prairies forever.

Bold, sturdy, brave have been thy heroes—men who have turned their backs on peaceful lands and made new homes upon thy borders, where the war-cry of the Comanche and the yelp of the coyote are heard by day and by night.

Land of flowers and of thorns—of rolling prairies and desert plains, of dense chaparrals, mountain ranges, crystal streams and sunny valleys; land of cotton, corn and cattle, of sugar and luscious fruit, of the civilized and the savage, and where the sun ever shines and the grass is ever green—land of enchantment and of romance, who that has once dwelt within thy borders can cease to love thy sunny clime—who that has left thy boundaries dreams not of thy velvet prairies, forest-fringed rivers, and longs not to again revisit the scenes once loved so well, and ever held in fond remembrance?

Once again am I to bound upon my fleet mustang and dash over thy plains, and through thy dark canyons; but it is only in remembrance, and those who kindly follow my pen-trail shall I lead into scenes of wild adventure, desperate

daring, and rude haunts, where the crack of the rifle will often ring in their ears, the rattle of the revolver be heard, the clash of the fatal bowie awake steely echoes, and the death-cry and shout of victory mingle together.

Let those, then, who would strike my ink-trail, come with me to the banks of the Medina river, at a point some ten miles from San Antonio, for there the first scene of my "ower true story" opens.

Upon both sides of the river extend the bottom lands, covered with a growth of timber, consisting of pecan and post-oak, and beyond this fringe of forest spread the prairies, dotted with herds of cattle and mustangs, and covered with velvet grass, bespangled with flowers of every hue and fragrance.

The sun has just gone down beyond the plain, and a hazy twilight rests upon the landscape lulling one to dreamy laziness.

Gradually the shadows darken in the timber, and the heavy festoons of Spanish moss hanging from the branches of the trees, moved by the evening breeze, sway to and fro, looking like ghostly forms in the weird light.

The red sky in the west is almost wholly hid-



"HALT!" COMES SHARP AND QUICK FROM KIT CARSON, JR., AS THEY ARRIVE WITHIN HEARING OF THE INDIANS.

den from our view by the dense foliage, and the birds have flown to roost on the borders of the forest, so as to bask in the last rays of the setting sun.

A slowly-given chirp or so from the insects, just clearing their throats to join with the frogs in their coming concert, when darkness settles more densely upon the earth, only serves to make our surroundings more gloomy.

But look! Man has invaded the solitude, for as we look up the river, we discover a small log house standing only a little removed from its bank.

Above the house, and to the west of it, is a corral; its gates are open and it is empty.

The climbing vines by the cabin door, the flower-beds in its front indicate that they have had the delicate care of a woman.

Saddles and lariats hang from the corral gate; a stone bake-oven and smoke-house stand near the cabin, and a huge pile of split rails lie upon the bank, just below.

This is the house of a Texan *ranchero*, and peace and quiet now reign supreme about it.

The firelight flashing from the hospitable open door enables us to inspect the interior, and ascertain the character of the occupants.

In one corner, busily engaged in winding a web of yarn, is an aged lady, who peeps under or over her spec's, as the yarn puzzles her by becoming entangled.

At the fire, cooking venison-steaks, and now and then turning the iron oven which contains the pone of corn-bread destined for the evening meal, is a woman of some thirty-five years of age, and near by, sitting in an apparently dreamy mood, gazing into the firelight, is a beautiful girl of sixteen summers. The long dark-brown natural curls are not able to hide the cheeks, rosy with the hue of health, or her bright, laughing hazel eyes; the hand which supports her well formed head is plump and pretty, and we are forced to give her more attention than we have the others, for her great beauty and innocent appearance cause us to linger in our inspection of the cabin in spite of ourselves; but a slight rustle at our back draws attention in that direction, and we see an infant asleep upon a spotless white spread bed in the corner.

Although the floor of the cabin is but clay, and the furniture of the most primitive kind, there is an air of neatness and refinement about everything, and be he who he may, a hearty welcome would greet any one who asked hospitality at the hands of the occupants.

This is the ranch, and I have shown you the family, of William Halliday.

William Halliday went to Texas from Virginia some two years previous to the opening of our story, and by his upright dealing and honorable character gained many friends; and yet he was to have the most horrible experience of Indian brutality and Mexican treachery of any man on the frontiers of the Lone Star State.

The supper-table was spread; the venison-steaks threw out a delicious odor, mingled with the aroma of coffee; the pone of corn-bread was taken from the oven, and wrapped in a cloth; Mrs. Halliday then, in a nervous manner, pushed up the loose coals with a stick into the fire, and cast a look about the cabin to see if everything was in its place; then she steps to the open door, gazes with an anxious look through the darkness up the creek, and heaving a deep sigh turns back into the room, exclaiming, impatiently:

"Oh! how I wish Will would not stay away so late! I think he must have gone to Castroville. What do you think, mother?"

"I heard him say something about ammunition; don't worry, daughter."

"Yes, that must be it; he certainly would not be hunting stock far enough away to keep him so long. I cannot keep from feeling worried about his going out alone, since Jim Slocum was killed and scalped, only five miles from here."

"He's all safe, daughter, you can rest assured."

"I wonder why it is," said Mrs. Halliday, "that the Government will persist in stationing infantry at Fort Clark instead of cavalry, for if scouting parties of cavalry were kept out from Camp Verde and Fort Clark, I do not think we should be in any danger from the Indians here. I never lay down at night without expecting the war-whoop before morning. What are you thinking about, Mary?"

The young lady, who had still kept gazing into the fire while her mother had been speaking, now roused herself upon being directly addressed, arose from her chair, and running her fingers through her long curls with an impatient movement commenced to pace the room, answering her mother as she walked:

"I was thinking, mother, that if Captain Burleson's Rangers were only stationed near here we would then have no fears of Indians or Mexicans; I do think it is dreadful to be constantly in fear of these fiends, who take delight in bloodshed and torture."

"I agree with you in regard to the Rangers," said Mrs. Halliday, "but they cannot be everywhere at the same time. It seems to me that ever since that scouting-party came here, you

have greatly changed. Who was it you took such a fancy to—Kit Carson, Jr.?"

At the mention of this name, Mary's cheeks became of a scarlet hue, which deepened as her grandmother remarked, in the slow manner peculiar to age:

"Yes, that's the lad; I noticed our Mary took to him from the first time he entered the cabin; his bright laughing eyes, his joyous songs and dashing style would have run me wild, I reckon, had I been young."

"Well, he is a right pert boy," answered Mrs. Halliday, "and I hope he does not drink or gamble if our Mary is to be anything to him. I have seen so much woe and misery in my day caused by rum that I would rather see one that was near and dear to me stretched in her coffin than wedded to one who drinks."

"Mother!" exclaimed Mary, in a decisive manner, "I know he does not drink, for not only has he told me so himself, but I have heard the Rangers often speak of it as being so strange, for they all use liquor, more or less. You remember, grandmother, what happened when they were here? I was in their camp with father, when some of them were drinking, and two of the Rangers, who were the best of friends when sober, became mad at each other, and went out into a post-oak *motte* near camp, and fought a duel, in which one was killed. Joe Sommers, the next morning, when he found he had shot his best friend, Charley Newcomb, came near going crazy, and cried over the body half the day. He said 'he did not remember anything that had happened while drunk;' and Kit asked Joe to swear that he never would touch anything intoxicating again so long as he lived, which he did willingly, asking God to help him keep his oath and forgive him for his great crime. The Rangers would have hung Joe to a post-oak limb, but he had fought 'sugar,' as they say, and took no advantage of Charley. Why, mother, I am positive Kit does not drink, or use tobacco in any form."

"Well, Mary," said Mrs. Halliday, "I must say that he is a model young man, and the only one I've seen on the frontier who is free from the vices of drinking and gambling, for I've heard him say myself he knew nothing about cards. I like his appearance very much; so does your father. What keeps him so late?"

CHAPTER II.

RED DEVILS.

Just as the last words left the mouth of Mrs. Halliday, a rifle-shot burst on the stillness of the night, followed by a yell of agony, and the sharp, quick clatter of horses' hoofs came toward the cabin from up the river.

"My God! what means that shot and yell?" exclaimed Mrs. Halliday, in a frightened and horrified tone, as she sprung to the door of the cabin.

As she gazed out into the darkness, a horse came bounding and panting, crushing the flower-beds, up to the door, and a powerfully-built man jumped from the animal's back to the ground, thrusting her into the cabin, at the same time striking the horse a violent blow with his quirt, which caused him to bound away down the river.

Will Halliday—for it was the ranchero—as he struck his horse, turned one anxious look toward the corral, when, from behind the gate, burst a quick, bright flash, followed by a loud report, and a dull thud, as the bullet entered the logs of his home near him.

Will bounded inside, closed and double-barred the door; then, hastening to his horror-struck wife, he folded her in his arms an instant, pressed a kiss upon the white brow of his daughter, Mary, then saluted in a kindly way his trembling old mother, who had dropped her yarn and sat dumb with terror and amazement.

"Be brave!" exclaimed Will, in a cheery manner, "all of you, and help in place of hindering me. Get all my extra ammunition, Mary, and spread it out on the table. I've got hard work ahead. The Comanche murderers have run me five miles; they have burned Cotton's ranch, and I reckon have killed them all up the river. Mary, get your little rifle, my brave girl, and watch the loophole toward the creek. If you can brain a squirrel from the top of a pecan you can do some shooting here that will count up for us."

"I'll try, father."

"I know you will. The moon will be up soon and we can have a chance at the red fiends. It is not as dark now as when I rode down-stream. I trust in God and my rifle. Pray to Him, my dear ones, that He will not desert us. You had better put out the fire, Mollie; it might cause our ruin. Don't you fret, grandmother; I reckon we can beat them off."

"I pray God that you may, my son," said the old lady, in a low, trembling voice. "I'm old, but would choose to die a natural death."

A scattering volley of rifle-shots broke the deep silence outside, and a shower of balls and arrows came pattering against the log walls.

"A low wail came from the baby on the bed, which caused Will to spring from his loophole, and imprint a loving kiss on his infant's lips, but in an instant he was back again at his post.

Mary, her little rifle grasped firmly, her blood-

less lips compressed in a determined manner, stood gazing from the loophole at the north side of the cabin, next the river.

Suddenly her cheek is pressed close to the wall of logs, and she peers into the darkness with double interest. A shot from her father's rifle, the death-yell of a savage, and the maddening whoops of the others, do not distract her.

What does she see?

Just back of the cabin, and not twenty feet from it, stands a pecan tree whose branches overhang the roof. Slowly climbing up the trunk of this tree Mary discovers an Indian; his purpose is plain to her; she sees that the savage intends to make his way out upon the projecting branches, drop down upon and cut his way through the thatched roof; others, who are now watching him, will follow; and while those in front draw the attention of her father, these will have the family at their mercy.

The Indian has gained the first branch of the pecan, and yet Mary does not fire; she hesitates, pale as death, for she has never taken human life, but sees the necessity of doing so now to save those she loves from a horrible death.

The Indian reaches up to clutch the limb above him; his arms are stretched as far as possible, his fingers catch, then cling about the branch. Mary hesitates no longer; her little rifle is thrust from the loophole and steadily aimed at the warrior in the tree. She pulls the trigger; a sharp report follows.

The painted brave clutches wildly at the branch, swings this way and that an instant, then falls backward with a wild death-yell crashing down through the bushes into the river, and sinks beneath its dark waters.

As Mary's rifle sent its messenger of death, the moon's rays filtered through the branches of the bottom timber, showing the Indians the defeat of their first plan to enter the cabin, as they saw the fall and heard the yell of their comrade from the fatal tree.

The appearance of the moon now gave Will a chance to send three shots, one after another, from his Sharp's rifle, into the group of braves that stood before the cabin and cause them to take to cover.

Now all became silent in and about the cabin; Mrs. Halliday, pressing her infant to her breast, crouched by the side of her mother in one corner, both pale and trembling.

Will, with his rifle grasped firmly, and a cartridge between his teeth, gazed through the loophole in his front by the door, and Mary, firm as a rock, now, stood at her post.

What would be the next move of the Indians none knew; half a dozen had been killed by Will and one by Mary; but the woods seemed full of the fiends, judging from their yells, when one of their number gave the death-howl.

One thing was sure—they must have noticed that no shots came from the ends of the cabin, and Will, thinking of this, walked to the loopholes and took a survey from each up and down the river. He was too late; he could not look up into the post-oak next the corral in the branches of which lurked half a dozen red warriors.

He returned to his post in the front just as a dozen Indians, bearing a log as a battering-ram, in a dead run, sent it crashing against the door, which quivered and splintered, sending a thrill of horror through the hearts of the whites in the cabin.

Will fired instantly into the group of braves as they gathered about the log for a second effort, and two more warriors fell to the earth, while the remainder, with fierce yells of disappointment, sprang back among the timber.

As Will fired his rifle, and was gazing out to ascertain the effect, the thatch was torn from the roof next the corral, and in an instant half a dozen dark forms dropped silently into the cabin!

The first thing to alarm Will and Mary was the crashing of a tomahawk through the skull of his old mother, and a scream of terror from Mrs. Halliday.

The reports of his own and Mary's rifle blended together as they strove to defend those they loved. Two braves gave their last yell as the exultant whoops of the other four warned those outside of their success.

Will fell senseless to the floor from the blows of the tomahawks, and was at once bound as were also Mary and her mother.

The din of conflict inside was suddenly stopped by a terrific crash as the door flew in splinters, into the center of the cabin, followed by a score of war-painted fiends in human form, who dragged the poor helpless prisoners out into the moonlight.

All three were bound to trees opposite the cabin, and the body of the old lady was thrown brutally in front of the bound captives, and scalped before their eyes!

There was a wild glare in the eyes of Mary and her mother which told of a desperate horror that was painful to witness, but when an Indian came swinging the little babe by one leg, and its plaintive cry reached the mother's ears, this glare gave place to such a pleading, piteous look that any but a heart of stone would have melted at the sight; but it had no effect upon

the red brute, who threw the infant roughly upon the dead body of its grandmother, and hastened back to the pillage of the cabin with his brother butchers.

In less than ten minutes the household goods—in fact everything an Indian would value—were taken from the home of the Hallidays, and bright flames sprung through the roof toward heaven, as if calling upon the powers above to witness this act of fiendish cruelty.

Amid the glare of the burning cabin the dancing demons came yelling toward the captives to feed their insatiable love of cruelty upon their pain and misery.

One of the Indians, who was by his dress and bearing a chief, walked up to the tree to which Will was bound, and ran his scalping-knife directly through the fleshy portion of his arm.

With a deep groan, which was answered by agonizing shrieks from his wife and daughter, Will lifted up his bowed head and opened his eyes upon the horrid scene before him.

His eyes glared with madness, horror and desperation as he took in the dreadful view—the blazing cabin, his wife and daughter bound, as he was himself, like dogs, the dead body of his wife's mother scalped and mutilated, and his darling infant boy, the pride of his heart, writhing upon the ground among the red demons, who danced with fiendish joy at the sight of his misery.

His sufferings had only just begun. The babe was grasped by one leg by a burly savage and tossed high in the air, being caught, as the poor innocent descended, by another, and then thrown up again and again, amid the heartrending screams of his poor mother.

This dreadful sight caused Mary to faint. The father and husband writhed at his bonds, while the agony-sweat stood in large beads upon his forehead.

A wild cry of anguish burst from the despairing parents as the chief sent the head of the poor baby crashing against the trunk of a post-oak, crushing out its brains, and then throwing its lifeless form down beside the body of its dead grandmother again.

With hellish laughter the red devils watched and fed upon the agony of the parents; the lurid flames flashed and crackled, lighting up the scene of horror, torture and death.

The Indians formed in line, the chief at the head, and went circling, dancing, whirling and yelling past their captives, until at last the head of the line stopped before Mrs. Halliday; her clothing was stripped in shreds from her form, and each warrior, as he passed, gave her a gash with his knife; her shrieks became moans, her moans sighs, and finally, with the blood running in streams down her form to her feet, her head sunk on her breast.

Will's glassy eyes glared upon the gory form of his wife, a glare which spoke of a disordered brain.

The Indians, with wild yells, now drew their tomahawks, and sent them whizzing through the air at the head of Mrs. Halliday; they flew above, they flew to the right, they flew to the left, just grazing her beautifully molded head, and at last one of the murdering weapons went crashing through her skull, and her sufferings were at an end.

Her scalp was torn from her head by the chief, amid the exultant shouts of the braves, and they danced with hellish joy as they waved it on high—as if defying Heaven—the bloody trophy.

At the whirr of every tomahawk a deathly, dreadful horror ran through the frame of poor Will, causing his form to cringe and shrink, and sent flashes of agony, like seething lightning, through his brain.

One great heavy groan of unbearable agony escaped Will as the tomahawk clove the skull of his wife, and then his head sunk unconscious upon his breast.

The Indians now sprung hither and thither among the trees, flitting like veritable demons—as they were—gathering fagots, and heaping them about the tree to which Will was bound.

CHAPTER III.

RANGERS AT WORK.

RIDING like the wind, their mustangs covered with foam and panting with exertion, are three Texan Rangers, clad in buck-skin—their eyes bent upon the flame of the burning cabin up the stream.

The one in front, with long black hair, wild, piercing eyes and noble bearing, is Kit Carson, Jr.

Joseph G. Booth, who has won the title of "Reckless Joe," comes next. He is well known from the northern boundary of Kansas to the mouth of the Rio Grande; his light flaxen hair gives him an aspect almost girlish, but there is a stern determination about him that shows grit that may be relied upon in time of need; while he is the life of every party he is with, by his irrepressible good spirits.

Last, but not least, and never last in a charge, comes Tom Clark, one of Texas's adopted sons—a Texan at heart, true and brave, who scorns all *hifalutin* talk as he calls it, and uses as rough words as if he had never seen the inside of a school-house.

"Halt!" comes sharp and quick from Kit, as they arrive within hearing of the Indians. "Twist your lariats round a limb! Lively, boys; I'm afraid we're too late. Great God in heaven! if Mary is killed, my life is blighted forever, and I shall live only for revenge."

"By their yells, Kit," exclaimed Tom in a low tone, "I reckon thar's a heap o' the red cusses at the'r bloody work, but we can just knock 'em flying, or go under trying ter do ther job for 'em."

"Were there a thousand, I'd hurl myself among them and blot them from the face of the earth! Me soul is up in arms and eager for the fray! Lead on, Macduff, and damned—ay, doubly damned be he who first—"

"Easy with your Shakespeare, Joe!" warned Kit; "come on, boys, we'll go in on a run, and give them a few shots from our rifles, then just everlasting 'go for 'em' with our sixes at short range. Don't stop for the brush. 'Git up an' git!'"

Away toward the burning cabin bounded the three Rangers, beneath the dark shadows of the trees, leaving their horses behind, well secured.

The Indians were lighting the torture-fire about the tree to which Will was tied, when three rifles sent their lead into them, followed almost immediately by three more shots close onto them, for the Rangers ran like deer.

Six warriors fell dead, and others were wounded; the survivors stood an instant, bewildered at the unexpected attack, and that instant was fatal to many, for on came the Rangers, dropping their rifles and each drawing two revolvers from their scabbards and sending in a hail of lead as they ran.

The Indians fled in terror through the dark shadows of the bottom timber, leaving the fire just flickering up at the feet of Will.

Amid the *melee*, as the first shots were fired by the Rangers, the Indian chief sprung to the tree to which Mary was bound, cut the thongs, and grasping her about the waist, bounded into the woods and left his braves to fight without a leader.

In five minutes after the first shot was fired, not an Indian was to be seen, except the dead and dying, upon the ground.

The latter were soon sent on the long dark trail by Tom Clark, who did not wait for them to complete their death-songs, and who afterward went around lifting hair, while Kit and Joe kicked away the wood and cut loose poor Will from the tree.

"Where in the name of Heaven is Mary, Will?" exclaimed Kit, in a hoarse, excited voice; but he got only a wild, insane stare as an answer from the ranchero.

Reckless Joe busied himself in bathing the wounds of Will, while Kit and Tom inspected minutely everything about the ranch, for some clew as to the whereabouts of the young girl, but they had no success.

The dead bodies of seventeen Indians lay scattered about the scene of torture, and near the cabin. Some fifteen they thought might have escaped. It had been a dear raid for the Indians.

"Kit," said Tom, "I'd 'a' gi'n my sculp to 'a' got here sum sooner. We c'u'd 'a' cleaned out ther hull caboodle, an' had a smart chance to hav' saved the family."

"I wish to God we had, Tom."

"Thar's one thing sure, Kit, and sartain; a heap on 'em has passed in thar checks, and quit the game without hair. I ha'n't had sich a show to lift sculps since we were at Santa Anna's Peak. Yer lookin' blue, pard, but never you mind; the pesky reds has skuted with Molly, but we'll strike ther trail, come sun-up, and get her from them, if we has tew scout clean tew the Staked Plains."

"You don't know who has got her, do you, Tom?" exclaimed Kit, in a dubious tone. "He's the hardest and fastest rider this side the Rockies. I know his sign, for I've been on his trail many times. He's a pard of Big Foot, the Comanche chief, and they call him Bear Claw. This ain't the first bloody work I've seen of his doing."

"If it had not been for the Tonkaway they'd got Will, dead sure, but, what's done is done. I reckon it would have been a mercy if they had put Will up; but come, Kit, let's go and see how Joe gets along with him."

As Kit and Tom approached the scene of torture a tall, finely-formed Indian of the Tonkaway tribe came riding up on a fiery mustang, leading the three horses of the Rangers that had been left down the river, when they charged the Indians.

"Hallo, Raven, yer jist in time ter be late; ther fandango are over an' ther music has gone up creek. Couldn't you find t'other boys, or what's the matter? We c'u'd 'a' made a bigger splurge if yer had 'a' been here, an' ye've lost hair by it, sure."

"Raven no find white warriors," exclaimed the Indian, regretfully; "camp-fire gone out—trail points to Bravo—Raven come quick, as can ride—kill one horse—cotch one on prairie."

The Indian sprung from his mustang down among the dead Comanches, spurning them with his feet, and gazed with bitter hatred upon the silent forms.

Making the horses fast to the branches of a live-oak he was soon groping around the smoldering cabin, inspecting each and every footprint with intense interest.

"I'll bet my sombrero," protested Tom, "that in less time than I'd take ter skin a buck Raven 'll tell us every danged red what's knocked under, an' how ther scrimmage started."

"Boys," announced Reckless Joe, for once in his life wearing a serious air, "I've fixed up Will's wounds, but I reckon he'll never be good fer much; he's wild—crazy as a loon, and I don't wonder at it; such a sight as I pray God I may never see again. We must bury these poor mutilated bodies out of sight, and then perhaps Will may be more like himself."

"I seen a spade nigh the corral," said Tom, "an' I'll tote it this-a-ways, then we'll dig a grave big enuf fur all three."

Tom at once went to the spot designated, returning shortly after with the article mentioned, and commenced to dig a grave not far from the dead bodies, beneath the shadows of a large tree. Will Halliday still sat with the same insane glare in his eyes, gazing fixedly at the dead before him, while Kit and Joe stood with folded arms, watching Tom as he threw the rich soil from the grave.

"Gentlemen," said Kit, earnestly, "this forced inactivity maddens me, when I know Mary is in the hands of the red fiends; but I know it is useless to try and do anything until daylight, unless the Tonkaway, with his keen eyes, makes some discovery."

Kit's remarks were here interrupted by Tom, who sprung from the new-made grave, and wiped the sweat from his forehead, saying:

"Waal, boys! I reckon that's more diggin' than I've done in sum months—not since we had that big scrimmage in the Wichita mountains."

"Yes, Tom," answered Kit, "that will do. Why did you not allow us to help you as it was a hard job?"

"I wanted no help, Kit," answered Tom; "Mrs. Halliday war alwis kind ter me, an' I'll feel better, seein' it had ter be did, that I helped lay her away decently. I'm going ter fix the grave nice an' soft."

And Tom then climbed up a post-oak, and threw down long masses of Spanish-moss to spread upon the bottom of the grave. The Rangers then dropped their hats upon the grass, and reverently lifted the dead and laid them side by side in the grave—three generations, grandmother, daughter and granddaughter.

Will, watching every movement with flashing eyes, crawled on his hands and knees to the head of the grave, took his place there, gazing down at his dead dear ones.

It was a solemn and impressive sight; the smoldering cabin at times sent up a fork of flame, and then died down, causing a lurid gloom to hover over all.

The swaying festoons of moss cast fantastic shadows about the strange scene, and black clouds went sweeping across the heavens, at times hiding the hazy moon.

"Can yer say a prayer, Kit?" asked Tom. "I've fergot 'em all what my mother larnt me long ago—shame on me that I has."

Tears ran down the cheeks of these rough rangers of the prairies as Kit, with a trembling voice, muttered a prayer for the murdered innocents in the grave beneath him.

As the deep, sincere and solemn "Amen!" left the lips of the Rangers the Tonkaway glided up noiselessly to the grave, with his hands full of flowers, and scattered them over the dead, saying:

"They good to Raven—give meat when hungry—let him lay by fire when cold norther blows—Raven heart full sorrow—Raven find trail, kill Comanche dogs—know chief—know how many warriors—know where gone."

"Whar yer bin, Tonk?" exclaimed Tom, in surprise; "yer as wet as a bogged buffler. Did yer fall in ther river?"

"No," answered Raven; "never fall—Comanche fall in river from tree—Raven go dive for scalp—"

Raven at this held up to view the dripping trophy so much prized by his people.

"Waal, I must say yer hanker arter hair, worsen 'en I do ter go into ther river fur it; but we'll jist fill up ther grave, boys, an' see what the Tonk's found out."

Tom took the spade, and was about to push in the earth, when Will sprung forward, wrenched the spade from his hands, and again took his place at the head of the grave, his eyes glaring like a maniac's, the spade clutched tightly in his hands.

"Let him alone, boys," said Joe, "you can do nothing with him; he hates to see them covered up. He may get over this, and bury them himself. It is very evident that we must leave him with his dead, for we must see if Raven can point to a way of assisting Mary, if she is indeed a prisoner."

The Indian stood calmly by the trunk of a tree, but when Joe mentioned his name, he strode toward the smoking ruin of the cabin, saying:

"Come—Raven will speak wise words."

All four halted as they reached the ruined ranch, and the Indian again addressed them.

"See, Comanche climb tree, here—get shoot—fall in river—more climb that tree—five," holding up his hand with fingers and thumb extended.

"Count tracks—bark scratch—limb broke—make big noise over there—Injun in tree—break roof, drop down—kill old squaw—see!—where drag 'em—Will shoot, Mary heap brave; she shoot—two Injuns kill in cabin—burn most up, see!" and the Indian pointed out two charred forms amid the cinders, saying: "too bad—lose scalp—so many Injun dead—heap—twenty—so many go up creek," indicating on his fingers fifteen. "Bear Claw chief—he take Mary from tree—run fast to horse—ten miles away now—but we catch him—Raven know ford—"

"Then for God's sake let us start at once," exclaimed Kit, impatiently, "and not linger here. Come on, boys; to horse!"

Away, like the wind, went the Rangers and the Indian up the Medina river beneath the shadows of the live-oaks, at break-neck speed, leaving Will Halliday seated alone at the head of the grave watching his dead.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMANCHE CAMP.

WHEN Bear Claw bounded through the post-oaks, with the unconscious Mary Halliday, he soon came to where his war-party had left their mustangs. Making his way through them, he halted by a powerfully-built horse, as black as midnight, pawing the sward impatiently.

The horse gave a neigh of recognition as the Indian chief loosened the lariat, after laying Mary down at the foot of a tree.

Springing into the saddle he urged the animal to where Mary lay, still unconscious, stooped down, and with an apparent slight effort, swung the senseless form up in front of him. The mustang snorted and pranced for a moment at the unaccustomed load, but was quieted by a few words from the Indian chief. Bear Claw sat a moment like a statue, his eagle-feathers mingling with the Spanish moss which hung from the limbs above him.

He bent his head toward the scene of the massacre, and as there came a rush of many dark forms beneath the trees, the prolonged yelp of the black wolf issued from his lips, which was answered by the hooting of owls as his warriors sprung upon their mustangs, and urged them up around him.

Bear Claw gave a deep grunt of anger as he saw how his followers had been reduced by the deadly fire-arms of the Rangers.

"Do the white dogs with fast-shooting guns follow our trail?" demanded the chief, anxiously. "Do they know the Rose of the Medina rides in the arms of Bear Claw? Where are my braves? I see not many. Speak, Red Fox."

The Indian Bear Claw addressed rode close up to him, before replying.

"The white dogs weep over dead squaws—not stop long—heap mad—Eagle Eye Carson on trail soon—want squaw—no find Red Rose—know Bear Claw got him—the Red Rose—got with heap blood—Red Fox has spoken."

"Did the Red Fox see the Eagle Eye Carson? Will the young white chief follow the trail of Bear Claw?"

"Red Fox see—Eagle Eye will come—fast-shooting guns," answered the warrior.

"Come, warriors of the Pecos," cried Bear Claw, authoritatively, "the white dogs will find a long, blind trail; the Eagle Eye's squaw will sweep the lodge of an Apache chief."

Bear Claw swung his quirt about the hams of his mustang, who, with a wild snort bounded away through the darkness up the Medina river, followed by the remainder of his war-party, who urged their animals to their greatest speed.

On, on, they went, like fiends let loose from Hades, through the dark shadows of the oaks. On, on, hour after hour, until the break of day, when they dashed down the banks of the Medina, and into the cool waters, allowing their mustangs to drink; they themselves throwing the water with their hands up into their parched mouths, as only an Indian can.

Poor Mary was still unconscious, and it was evident the chief wished her to remain so, or he would have revived her with the refreshing waters of the stream.

They stopped but a moment, then scrambled up the steep bank to the other side, and galloped through the bottom timber out on the open prairie beyond.

Here, at a command from Bear Claw, a warrior sprung from his mustang, gathered some twigs and dry grass, struck a fire with flint and steel, and then with water from a gourd, so sprinkled it, that a column of white smoke arose, and all watched intently for an answer to this "prairie telegram."

They had not long to wait, for another column of smoke soon appeared, some three miles up the river, and the Indians again started in a fast lope toward the point from which the signal arose.

It took but a short time, at the headlong pace which they rode, to gain this point, and they were soon riding into the camp of another war-

party of their tribe, consisting of some fifty braves, who looked in wonder and amazement at the small number of warriors which made up the party of Bear Claw.

The latter passed the still insensible form of Mary to one of the Indians, who placed her on the ground beneath a small shelter made of Mexican blankets, after securing her wrists together by buckskin thongs.

A tall, finely-formed warrior, whose eagle-plumes and silver breastplate showed him to be a chief, stalked across the camp and approached Bear Claw, who stood where he had dismounted, awaiting a welcome. Each chief drew a scalping-knife and ran the blade into the ground at his feet, and each took the hand of the other, and placed the same upon his heart, as a token and sign of peace and brotherhood.

"Bear Claw is a great warrior," said the strange chief, "and is welcome to the fire and venison of Black Wolf. Where are the braves Bear Claw took toward the big water? Have the pale-face dogs sent them on the dark trail?"

"My braves are taking the big sleep," answered Bear Claw, "but they took many scalps. Eagle Eye Carson has many braves—shoot fast, their guns never empty—my warriors were making torture-fire—they fell like old leaves before the north wind; the bullets of the Rangers fly like the ice-hail among the Sioux."

"How many braves has the Eagle Eye?" asked Black Wolf. "Will he follow the trail of Bear Claw?"

"The smoke of the white dog's lodge blinded Bear Claw—he cannot tell—he will come—Bear Claw has stolen his squaw. Look!" said the chief, pointing to the wicky-up. "The rose of the Medina—her spirit is in the land of dreams—she is as a fawn—Bear Claw will take her to his lodge beyond the big plain."

A look of surprise and admiration spread over the features of Black Wolf, as he gazed upon the form of Mary, who seemed, even in her unconscious state, to be aware of the savage scrutiny; she writhed, moaned, opened her pale lips and bloodshot eyes, looking up in terror at the painted demons before her.

The sight of them brought all the dread horrors of the night previous back to her mind; a long wail of anguish burst from her lips, and her face became of a more deathly hue, as she again lost consciousness.

Black Wolf turned to Bear Claw, and addressed him:

"Bear Claw's squaw fair as prairie flower—look much sick—she will die before she see big plain—got good scalp for Bear Claw's shield."

"The Rose of the Medina will not die," said Bear Claw; "she will bring wood—she will cook venison for Bear Claw," and he stepped to the fire, took from the coals a large steak, shook the ashes from it, and carried it to the captive. Releasing her hands from behind, he tied them loosely in front, as she recovered her senses, so she could eat; he then placed the meat, together with some parched corn, upon a wooden platter, and set the same before Mary.

She gazed at him with a look of horror, and shrunk back into the further corner of the shelter.

"Why does the Rose fear the Comanche chief?" asked Bear Claw. "He will keep her path free of danger—the north wind shall not blow upon her—she will be the queen in the village—sorrow shall not come to her lodge—the sun shall always shine upon the flowers where she treads."

A mingled look of terror and great fear from Mary was his only answer.

Black Wolf stood with folded arms in front of the wicky-up, and it was plain to see that he took more than common interest in the captive maiden, but he wheeled about, and walked to the central portion of the camp, as if he feared his brother chief would discover his weakness.

The camp was situated in an opening of about an acre in extent, quite clear from trees or brush. When Black Wolf had reached the center of the encampment, he gave a signal which brought his braves from all quarters around him, and then he addressed them:

"Black Wolf is glad—his warriors have taken many scalps from the white-skins—their mustangs will make a wide trail. Black Wolf is sad—the scalps of Bear Claw's braves hang at the belts of the warriors of the Eagle Eye Carson. He a great chief—he will come for his squaw—he comes on trail of Bear Claw. Warriors, your eyes must be open—White Horse will take his braves, go where Bear Claw make watch for Eagle Eye Carson Rangers—Black Wolf will not move his camp—be not afraid—let them come."

Black Wolf waved his hand to White Horse, who, with a few quick motions, designated those that he wished to accompany him, and with five braves, armed with deadly Comanche bows, he disappeared from view amid the trees of the river bottom, going down the stream toward the ford.

White Horse and his braves had not proceeded far when a noble buck crossed their path, and following it they were led a long chase over the river; this caused a delay in their arrival at the ford that was favorable to those who were anxiously searching for the captive maiden.

CHAPTER V.

THE TONKAWAY'S MISSION.

KIT and his companions galloped steadily all the night without exchanging a dozen words; the Indian was in the lead; and Tom remarked, as they reached the ford about half an hour after the party of Bear Claw had crossed, that, "He'd bet his interest in the Mexican Republic that Kit had not held his tongue so long afore since he was born."

They soon saw by the fresh trail down the bank to the fort that the Tonkaway had been correct in his surmises in regard to the route taken by the Comanches.

Stopping a moment to water their mustangs, holding their Sharp's rifles ready for instant use, they then rode up the opposite bank; here Raven turned his horse toward Kit, saying:

"Eagle Eye stop here with braves—Raven see where Comanche gone—what do—no gone long."

The Tonkaway waited for no word of instructions, but sprung from his horse, passed the bridle-rein to Kit, and went with long swinging strides over the trail of the war-party, and was lost to view in the bottom timber.

"Tell yer what it are, Joe," exclaimed Tom Clark, thoughtfully, "I reckon Kit are goin' mad; he's strange; ain't like he used ter was; and his not slinging his gab seems awful peculiar. Why, Buffle Bill alwis introjuced him as Professor Talker, of Talkerville!"

"Don't you bother him, Tom!" warned Joe, earnestly; "he has that upon his mind which keeps him quiet: we'll have hard work keeping him from doing something rash."

"I'm afraid so. I kind a-feel a choking myself when I thinks of poor Will at that are grave in the post-oaks."

"I wish I could send word to Martha Wells in San Antonio," exclaimed Joe, "for God only knows how this trail will end."

"Boys," interrupted Kit, in a mournful tone of voice, "the reason you see me so silent is, that I'm thinking of Mary, and I feel confident Bear Claw has backers near. If we could only overtake him before he joins them!"

"You are about right, Kit," answered Tom, quickly. "I've bin thinkin' all the time 'bout same thing. Wait till Tonk comes in. Here he is now! He's a red what one can tie fast to, every time."

In the regular Indian lope, Raven came up the trail, saying warningly as he got near:

"Come—much open here—sharp eyes on river—come, thick brush up river—Raven got heap talk for white warriors."

The Rangers followed the Indian into one of the thickets which bordered the river above the ford, and all dismounted, seating themselves on the sward, secure from observation, holding the lariats attached to their horses in their hands, their rifles resting across their knees.

The Tonkaway, with stoical indifference, lighted his pipe, and blew a whiff of smoke to each point of the compass, then passed the pipe to Kit, who sat next to him.

Impatient as the Rangers were they knew the Indian character too well to speak before the pipe had been passed around; and, even then, they were forced to wait until Raven broke the silence, which he soon did in a low voice.

"Comanche trail go to open prairie; war-party stop there—light little fire—make smoke—mustangs no stamp round much—no stay long—get answer—another smoke—ride fast up river—heap big war-party up creek—Raven know where."

"That's just our luck," exclaimed Kit; "but, boys, if ther's a thousand red-skinned cusses, I'll hang on their trail for a chance to save Mary from the infernal, bloodthirsty fiends. You had better go back and look after Will, and then, joining our company, tell Captain Burleson that there's game up this way for him."

"Kit!" exclaimed Tom, "when I slip a trail on a pard yer can jist set me down fur a Greaser. I hope I'm half white, and Joe is b'ilin' over at ye; the idea of our lettin' yer play a lone hand! We'll stick!"

"You are right, Tom," added Joe, in a tone which showed that his feelings had been hurt by what Kit had said; "I never was known to desert a friend, and it's late in the day for me to begin that sort of a game, even if I had the desire. If I had been on the back-out it would have showed up before. Now, I'll tell you what I think. I have a plan in my mind that will put us all in a better fix for the hot work ahead."

"Go ahead! Give it to us," ordered Kit.

"Here it is, then, boys: Let Raven ride as fast as his nag can take him to San Antonio, and get Jack Hodge, Clown, and as many of the boys as he can, who are spoiling for a fight; they will come, you can bet high on that, and a half a dozen of us, armed as we are, will be able to make a rush into the camp of the reds, and get Mary before they know what we are after. Raven can also leave word for Burleson, and some of the boys will carry the news to him about the raid; and when he knows about it he will come if fifty northers were blowing. Here, Raven; all you have to do is to give this silver star to Jack Hodge, and he's on the trail at once, you bet! He owes me a life, and he won't

back, no matter what's ahead. And you go and see Martha Wells, you know where she lives, by the little church: tell her I'm off on a long trail, and am as happy as a hog in a mud-hole."

"Has yer got through, Joe?" demanded Tom, "for I reckon you and Kit has traded tongues, by the way yer run on; but I likes yer talk. It just suits me. What yer think about this new lay out, Kit?"

"I think it is a good plan," answered Kit, "for with a few more boys we can make it hot for the Indians, no matter how many there are of them. But how do you know, Raven, where they are camped, and how many there are?"

"Turkey buzzards tell Raven where camp—fly over camp—wait Injun go—then pick bones—know heap warrior or no camp near ranches—white braves stop here—Raven go see."

Before the Rangers could say a word, the Tonkaway had disappeared in the underbrush up the river.

"Waal," exclaimed Tom, in surprise, "I'll jist be chawed into hash by an alligator if that red don't beat every deal; yer can't help from likin' the cuss fur he ain't afeared of nothin'. Now, ten to one, if I crawled up ter that Comanche camp I'd lose my sculp. Joe, I've got a bottle of p'ison whisk' in my saddle-bags that'll kill as fur as yer can shoot."

Tom produced the bottle, and passed it to Joe, who, after taking a drink, returned it.

"Here's hopin' that we'll git Mary outter this scrape!" said Tom, gazing with satisfaction at the bottle, "and spile a few Comanches fur futer fit'in'?"

And after nearly emptying it, he stood and looked at Kit a moment, in a thoughtful manner, before addressing him.

"Kit, yer don't take no stock in this here stuff, an' I won't insult yer by shovin' it at yer. I'm a tuff cuss, I know, when I git b'ilin' over with rum, but I ain't bad enuf to urge a man ter drink what don't. What yer doin' Joe?"

"Well, me noble duke, I'm penning a few rose-tinted lines of fairy language to the lady of me heart, for that noble red-man to take to San Antonio. He's not a carrier-dove, I know, but necessity gives me no choice."

"Good fur yer, Joe!" exclaimed Tom, approvingly; "Martha Wells is a noble gal, an' so's the red, too. Martha's got true Texas grit, an' I don't blame yer fur bein' soft on her. Tell her yer sittin' on a bank of roses an' writin' with a moonbeam. Kit, bet yer a slug I can streak her through that Comanche camp on ther lope, shoot half a dozen reds, and not git skin broke!"

"Don't, for mercy sake, talk that way," responded Kit, anxiously. "I'm sorry you drank that whisky."

"Bosh!" returned Tom, bluntly; "that whisk' has nothin' ter do with it. I can't lay still long; I hanker fur sculps when they are so danged near, an' I'm spoilin' to twist my fingers in Comanche hair. I tell you what, boys, I'm a-goin' ter take a smoke ter pass time."

Tom lit his pipe and lay back on the bank to enjoy it, while Joe wrote his note to Martha, and Kit, with his hat pulled over his eyes, lay listening impatiently for some sound which would indicate the return of Raven.

It was an hour before the latter glided in among them, and showed, by his heavy breathing that he had run fast and long. At last he broke the silence:

"Raven say right—big camp—many warriors—see Mary—she tie up in blanket wigwam—look much sick—cry heap—Raven heart beat hard for Eagle Eye squaw—two big chiefs in camp, Bear Claw, Black Wolf—Raven go quick San Antonio—must have more white warriors—ride fast—be there when dark come—Eagle Eye stay here—no go Comanche camp—lose scalp—Raven come—then heap fight may-be-so—good-by."

Raven at once sprung on his mustang.

"Hold, Raven!" exclaimed Joe; "here, take this paper to Martha Wells; also find Jack and give him this star, sure."

Kit gave one spring, grasped the bridle-rein of the Indian's horse, his eyes wild, and said, in a hoarse, unnatural voice:

"Look, Raven! Don't you go back on me. Tell the boys it is life and death; that the best girl in the world is in the power of the Comanches, and if they don't come quick I'll charge the camp if I have to go it alone. Do you think they will harm or misuse her, or torture her? Here! look me in the eye, and tell me the truth, Raven; spit it out white, plain and square. Come! speak!"

"Bear Claw no hurt Mary," answered the Tonkaway, as he looked without flinching into the eye of Kit; "keep her for squaw—take her long trail—go to village on big plain—so he think—Raven think get her back—she again with Eagle Eye before moon small."

Raven whirled his quirt high over his head, and lashed his mustang, who sprung, with a wild snort, over the brush, and horse and red rider were in a moment lost to view, as they dashed down the bank across the ford.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TONKAWAY'S GREAT RIDE.

THE Tonkaway, his head bent forward, his mustang urged on in a wild gallop by the tor-

turing quirt continually applied to his hams, kept on the same trail down the bank of the Medina river that he passed over with Kit and the other Rangers the previous night.

He was within a mile of the scene of the massacre when loud shouts and oaths in the Spanish tongue reached his ears from the prairie to the south, beyond the bottom timber, beneath the shade of which he was riding.

Raven immediately turned his horse in that direction, and soon the border of the woods permitted him to gain a view through the branches of the prairie.

Here a sight met his gaze which made him wish Kit and the boys were with him.

A score of Mexican bandits were collecting the cattle and horses of Will Halliday, and the bravado they showed in approaching so near to San Antonio satisfied Raven that they belonged to the band of that noted outlaw, Juan Cortina.

The Tonkaway was sure, at a glance, that in twenty-four hours' time all that remained of Will Halliday's property would be far away toward the Rio Grande.

He paused but an instant to take in the situation of things, knowing that he was powerless to prevent the wholesale robbery, and muttering to himself:

"Poor Will!—much heap trouble," he once more bounded down the river toward the ruined ranch, where, after a few minutes of hard riding, he arrived.

Raven cast a hurried glance toward the grave; Will still sat in the same position, gazing down at his dead, and there was the same insane madness in his eyes that all Indians respect, as well as dread, and the Tonkaway gave Will a wide berth.

Raven slackened the speed of his mustang among the dead Comanches, and springing from the animal he secured a many-colored Mexican blanket, or *serape*, and a little further on, the hat of Will, which had been left behind by the Indians; the latter he adjusted upon his head, after removing his head-dress of eagle feathers, and the former he wrapped about him, saying to himself:

"Raven meet pale-face—think Raven Comanche—shoot Raven—have hat—have blanket—no shoot;" and thus changed in appearance, he once more galloped down the river.

He was then twelve miles from San Antonio. On, on galloped the faithful Tonkaway through the live-oaks, his eyes glancing suspiciously upon all sides.

The sun sunk toward the west, leaving the timber in a twilight gloom.

Passing the Mexican *haciendas*, on the high bank of the river, just on the side of the Pleasanton trail, Raven went plunging down into the ford, allowing his mustang but a moment to take a swallow, which he greatly needed, well knowing he must not allow him to drink too much. He then urged his horse out of the cool stream and went speeding on through the mesquites, toward the Alamo City.

Half a mile after mile was passed over, and the mustang began to show signs of giving out, for he was covered with foam, and traveled at a staggering gait.

The sun had passed below the western horizon, as the exhausted and broken-down horse fell to the earth, just upon the borders of the opening in which stood the old Mission of St. Conception.

Raven quickly unbuckled bridle and saddle, taking them into one of the old cells, used formerly by the priests, but now occupied by thousands of bats.

In another moment the Tonkaway was in the long strides peculiar to his people, fast making his way through the chaparral, and in less than an hour he arrived in the vicinity of Madam Condleno's fandango-house, which was just one mile from the Main Plaza of San Antonio.

It had now been dark some time, and the Indian's sharp ears detected the sound of music long before he reached the celebrated dancing-house.

His thoughts were upon how he should find Jack Hodge and Clown, and, thinking of them and their character, he decided that the fandango ought not to be passed by.

As Raven came close up to the house, the noise inside became deafening; curses both in Spanish and English were intermingling, and these were soon followed by a volley of revolver-shots.

Yells of agony, fear and death blended together strangely, with loud and exultant shouts of Texans; and then a score of Mexicans rushed out of the door, and scattered through the thick chaparral, with which the house was surrounded.

Half a dozen Texans sprung outside and sent several balls whizzing into the brush after the Greasers.

Raven glided behind one corner of the building, and waited for the excitement to abate, muttering to himself:

"Raven heap more safe—he Tonkaway—throw hat—throw blanket—put on eagle-feather—Raven no Greaser dog—git shoot."

The Tonkaway once more stood in his own true character, and was made happy by recog-

nizing the voices of Jack and Clown among the Texans, as they returned to the house, laughing over the retreat of the cowardly Greasers.

The Indian walked around the corner, and in an instant stood in the center of the dirt floor, his hands extended, palms outward, toward the Texans, his scalping-knife at his feet, the blade sticking in the earth.

Quickly as Raven had executed this maneuver, he was not so quick but several deadly tubes were leveled at him; but a warning cry from Jack Hodge caused them to drop.

Jack sprung toward the Indian, grasped both extended palms, and gave them a wring that showed his regard for the Tonkaway, had not welcome beamed from his round red face.

"Boys!" exclaimed Jack, earnestly, turning to the other Texans, "any man what harms this red has got me to clean out arterwards; he's white, no mistake! Clown! don't yer know ther Tonk? Yer gittin' blind?"

The person addressed came toward the Indian, rubbing his eyes, saying: "Them dog-gone candles kinder blur a feller's peepers arter cumin' in from ther dark. Wal, I'll jist be chawed up an' spit out by a Colorado cat-fish if it ain't Raven! In ther name of Crockett, whar ye cum from, black-bird?" and Clown gave the Indian a hearty shake of the hand.

The two persons who have now entered on the scene deserve more than a passing notice.

Jack Hodge, so long known in Texas as a stage-driver, Indian and Mexican-fighter, and at one time a city marshal of San Antonio, was a short, thick-set man, who always had a pleasant greeting for every one, and a happy and contented smile beamed continually on his face. In whatever society he found himself he was sure to use more or less stage and stable slang; but he was quick on the trigger and a sure shot.

Clown was about the same build, although not so stout; and having been shot once almost to pieces by the Indians, was not exactly straight in his upper works. He was a notorious character for many years in Texas, having fought alone on the Pecos river fifteen Apache Indians, killing nine and driving away the remainder; his limbs were somewhat crippled by wounds, and he was an inseparable pard of Jack Hodge.

As Clown grasped the hand of Raven and inquired, in his peculiar way, the news, Jack burst out, impetuously:

"I'll bet my mustang ag'in' two bits that ther cuss has news as black as ther bird he's named arter. I called one of my crack leaders, on the best team I ever yanked ribbons over, 'Raven,' an' ther cuss was alwis takin' ther bit atween his teeth an' tryin' to break the coach."

The Indian slipped his hand into his pouch, and took out the silver star, and passed it to Jack, and a crowd of *senoritas*, who had been dancing before the row, now gathered around.

"That star," said Jack, in a confident tone, "is from Reckless Joe, an' means I'm wanted, and I reckon you, too, Clown; you need not think I'd sling myself on a trail without you. Spit it out, Tonk; what's up? Jist had a scrimmage with them Greasers. Ther's four on 'em in the corner thar, what's stalled; yer can skulp 'em, Tonk, ef yer hard up fur hair. The yaller-skinned pepper-eaters thought they'd boss this fandango, but they slipped up on it, yer bet, an' won't shake a foot ag'in without it's over a hot fire."

"Raven no time for scalp," exclaimed the Indian, showing a shade of impatience. "Come, Jack—come, Clown—Raven got heap talk—chaparral close by—have council—must see Joe squaw—no time—come!"

The Tonkaway led the way out of the door into the darkness, followed by Jack and Clown, leaving the other Texans and Mexican girls gazing at each other in silent wonderment.

But this did not last long; the dead Greasers were thrown out into the brush, and the sound of music and dancing rung out once more, as if nothing had happened to mar the enjoyment of the evening.

The Tonkaway and Texans went but a short distance into the chaparral, then seated themselves closely to each other, upon the grass in the thick brush and thicker darkness, where the Indian addressed the two whites:

"Comanche thick on Medina—burn Will Halliday's ranch—burn Cotton's ranch—kill pap-poose—kill old squaw—kill heap more—Mary, Kit's squaw—Comanche got her—tie up—Bear Claw take her to lodge—Will know nothing—do nothing—Kit, Joe, Raven, Tom on trail—Bear Claw find Black Wolf—heap big war-party—Kit, Joe, Tom close by—watch Comanche—Raven come want help—Raven want horse—want see Joe squaw—Jack go—Clown go—more Texans go—get Mary—what say? Jack speak!—Raven ear open—Raven done."

"Where did you leave the boys and when?" questioned Jack, in surprise.

"Raven start when sun up there," pointing his arm in a direction to indicate four hours above the horizon. They at ford—half day ride—near Will ranch—ride to sunset—Mexican steal Will horse, cattle—drive to Bravo."

"Waal!" exclaimed Jack, in astonishment, "I never war hauled up by quite so sudden a jerk

afore. Come, it won't do ter sit here. We'll go to Sappington's stable for our nags, at same time get one for you, Raven. Clown, yer in, ain't you, old boy? Fun ahead mixed with hard ridin' an' close feed. We'll try an' git some other boys ter go."

The three walked quickly toward the road which led into San Antonio, as Clown answered:

"Go! you better bet I'm in every time, Jack, when you are; nothin' can part us until one or t'other passes in ther checks. I hain't got no good-byes to sling, so that won't hinder me; nobody cares for me but you."

"Thar's whar yer dangly fooled, Clown," returned Jack. "Many a man owes yer thar friendship; yer war alwis ready tew hitch up fur a long run, no matter how fur it war atween stations, fur anybody what were in trouble. I keep thinkin' about the boys. Here we are on the Plaza. Tonk, does yer want a drink of fire-water?"

"No," answered the Indian, quickly, "fire-water bad on trail—bad every time—make Injun big fool—make white man fool—Raven he no drink—no 'fraid whole Comanche nation—Raven drunk—maybe he 'fraid cayotee—fight himself—take own scalp."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Jack, "that's ther best temperance lecture I've heard fur a month of Sundays. Yer head's level, Tonk, every time; yer got more sense than half the white men. Here we are at Sap's; Clown, yer run down ter the widow Wells's with Raven, an' stick Joe's letter under ther door. If yer go in the wimmin will keep yer slinging tongue. I'll hev the hosses ready."

Clown and the Tonkaway glided down the dark street, turned to the right, and soon came to the cottage where Martha Wells, the sweetheart of Reckless Joe, lived.

He noiselessly slipped the letter under the door, and upon getting back to the stable found Jack with two horses equipped for the road, and holding another by a lariat for the Indian, unsaddled—for he was to get his saddle and bridle at the Mission, as they passed it.

Raven drew the rope, with a twist, around the under jaw of the animal, sprung upon his bare back, and all three, in an easy lope, rode through the almost deserted streets.

Jack stopped a moment at Jack Caile's bar-room, to procure a bottle of whisky, and to tell the barkeeper the news in regard to the raid, leaving word with him to inform others, who would be eager to join in the pursuit of the Indians.

Bounding once more on his horse, which the Tonkaway had held, all three went like the wind out of the city and through the mesquite trees.

As they came to the fandango-house, Raven said:

"Raven catch you quick," and sheered his horse off the trail into the chaparral.

Jack and Clown did not slacken their pace, knowing the Indian would keep his word.

"I'll bet my sombrero ag'in' a shuck cigarett that ther Tonk's gone fur them dead Greasers' scalps."

Jack was correct; the Indian seemed by instinct to know where the Mexicans were that had been shot in the row, and soon tore their scalps off, regained the blanket and hat he had left behind, and also a revolver and knife from one of the bodies. This occupied him but a moment, and he overtook his two friends as they neared the Mission.

Here Raven sprung from his horse, found his saddle and bridle by groping about the ruin, and in an instant was equipped again for the trail.

Jack and Clown were each armed with Sharp's rifles and those death-dealing weapons, the Colt's revolver; the Indian acting as guide, they dashed away to the aid of Kit Carson, Jr., and his companions.

CHAPTER VII. A FRIENDLY BEAR.

WE left Kit and his comrades hidden in the thicket, three miles below the Comanche camp, when the Tonkaway started for San Antonio after help.

When Raven had disappeared from their view, the boys seated themselves again upon the grass—Tom with his pipe, and Joe sending clouds of smoke through his nostrils, as he took from between his teeth, in true Mexican style, a shuck cigarette.

Kit walked impatiently up and down the little natural opening, in which the rangers and their horses were concealed, his wild, wandering eyes observing every movement of Joe, Tom and the animals, as if in a measure to distract his mind from the great strain imposed upon him by Mary being a captive in the hands of bloodthirsty savages, and his forced inactivity.

Suddenly the low, chuckling laugh of Tom, at some witty remark from Joe, turned Kit's attention to them more particularly; but on again looking toward the mustangs he was startled to see that they had jerked their heads from the ground, the long green grass still hanging from their mouths, and that they stood

with eyes and ears pointed toward the entrance of the trail, in the direction of the ford from the prairie, beyond where the signal smoke had been kindled by the Comanches.

The eyes of the mustangs glittered and snapped, their nostrils were distended, and a low snort, half fear, half surprise, burst forth.

A gentle hiss from Kit prevented the animals from making any loud noise, as they were well-trained prairie steeds that had traveled much on all sorts of trails.

"Stop your smoking, boys," commanded Kit; "there's reds within a quarter of a mile of us, sure as shooting. Leave the rifles right here, and no shooting with sixes either, or we're gone 'coons. We've got hot work before Raven gets back. And just remember—nothing but cold steel to do it with. Now's the time to do some fine scouting and slashing, too, I reckon. My opinion is they have sent a small party to watch the ford, not thinking that we have crossed yet, but they'll see by our trail we're here, and not one must ever reach their camp again to tell on us. Are you both ready?"

All this was rattled off by the fastest kind of talking, and in a low voice.

Joe and Tom had sprung to their feet at the first indication of danger by the horses, and all three stood close to each other, every sense strained to its utmost.

As Kit ceased speaking Tom laid one of his hands upon his shoulder, the other on Joe's, and said, hurriedly:

"Kit, yer jist right every way, 'cording ter ther way I put things up; they have sent sum of ther red cusses down to keep a look-out fur us an' we've got tew wipe 'em out or our game's up; we're dished, and Mary's a gone angel. Now, look-a-here; I've noticed things; I alwis do. When ther Tonk left us ter go further per-rarie fur sign, his trail war bordered on ther right by bushes as thick as these around our nest here, an' if that ain't a cosey place ter lay fur them reds an' knife them, I don't know nothin' 'bout an ambush; but it's got to be done now."

"Another thing, boys," said Joe, earnestly, "is, that if there is more than we number of the red devils, as we have to use steel, take the last three first, and strike home to the heart every time, then go for those ahead."

"Your head is level," whispered Kit; "now come on, and don't forget what depends upon a single mismovement of an arm."

And with a low hiss to the horses, the three Rangers glided silently through the brush which bordered their hiding-place, and entered the bottom timber which was quite open.

The quick glances of the scouts in each and every direction told them that the coast was clear, and with long strides, in single file, they made their way toward the prairie, avoiding the trail taken by the war-party, but keeping just upon its edge in the grass.

The thicket was reached which bordered this trail on the west, as they crouched down and cut away sufficient brush to enable each to spring clear into the trail upon anything that should pass.

The Rangers were not a moment too soon, for they heard the low, guttural tones of an Indian giving instructions, and an instant after they had prepared themselves for the expected fight, with their long bowie-knives grasped firmly, the Indians came in sight.

Just as the warriors came nearly abreast of those who were ready to pounce upon them, an incident occurred so favorable to the Rangers that it almost assured success in what might have been a very doubtful contest.

A huge black bear came waddling awkwardly along between the post-oaks from the east down to the river.

The bear drew the attention of the Indians in that direction, and away from the dangerous thicket.

Their eyes were fixed upon the bear as they came along within five feet of the concealed Rangers.

A quick gesture from Kit and three buck-skinned forms sprung out into the clear trail, three bowies flashed an instant in the air, and the next were buried to the hilt in the hearts of the last three Indians.

The death-hoofs had not broken the silence before the Rangers, with blood-sprinkled garments and dripping knives, sprung for the remaining three in front.

Each Indian had his right hand at his quiver drawing arrows to shoot at the bear, and as the death-yells of their comrades broke upon their astonished ears, they turned, but before they could fit arrows and pull bow, the Rangers were upon them.

It would have been more equal had they dropped their bows and drawn their scalping-knives; but they were so taken unawares they had not an instant of time to act before the Rangers were gazing into their eyes.

It was but a glittering, lightning-like play of steel for an instant, and then the hot life-blood poured out on the trail, and there came three Indian death-yells, hoarse and gurgling, echoing faintly through the bottom timber.

It was all done in a moment's time, and the last braves fell before the first had ceased to

gasp and contort their limbs in their death-agony.

The Rangers sunk panting beneath the trees, upon the opposite side of the trail, a few yards from the dead Indians.

"Six reds gone on the long, dark trail!" exclaimed Tom, exultantly, "an' nary one of us got a scratch! It ar' all owin' ter that b'ar. I used ter hanker arter b'ar-meat, an' I'm dog-gone hungry now, but I don't reckon it would chaw worth a picayune."

"We better rope the bear," said Joe, casting a thankful, friendly look at the animal, "and warn everybody not to harm him. We can put an underlope on his left ear and split the right, so we'll know him again."

"You may think me superstitious, boys," said Kit, in a hesitating manner, "but it's something singular in that bear happening to come along just in the nick of time; that bear was sent here I reckon by one of our guardian angels. When things look most desperate something turns up in our favor."

"I've an idea!" cried Tom, suddenly bursting into a low, chuckling laugh.

"Well, you'd better hold on to it," suggested Joe, interrupting his mirth, "for you don't have them often; they are as few and far between as cold water springs on the Staked Plains."

"Sling yer tongue, Joe," returned Tom, without showing that he was offended; "yer educated, an' got ther right; I knows yer don't mean nothin'."

"I was might mean to say it, Tom," exclaimed Joe, "but no offense was intended; it was only a joke. What's your idea? I'll own you do have good ones; and often in the brush and on the prairie help us all out, and that's more than I can say for myself."

"Out with it, Tom!" exclaimed Kit, impatiently; "no use sitting here, marks for some skulking red."

"Waal, boys," answered Tom, hardly able to restrain a laugh, "my idea is to bind them dead reds, standin' up, round that big oak by ther ford, and it'll give every cussed Indian that comes this way such a sudden set back that we'll git a better chance ter cut ther breath off. They'll think the Great Spirit has throwed 'em over."

"It can't do any harm," returned Kit, "and I think, as you say, it may be a good thing for us."

"Hold on!" exclaimed Tom, springing to his feet; "we hain't taken off thar top-knots yet. Pick yer meat an' take yer hair."

"Tom!" cried Kit, quickly, "don't do it; I think it is disgusting to see a white man take a scalp. I really wish you would not do it, or if you do, let it be when I'm not about."

"Anything to please yer, Kit," returned Tom, "but I hates to see so much hair wasted. Thar's enuf ter trim a bridle up gay. Here we go, boys; drag 'em along."

Each Ranger grasped an Indian by the arms, and dragged him to the oak, which stood by the ford on the bank of the river, and could be plainly seen by any one coming from the opposite side. Returning to the thicket they dragged the other three also to the tree, and Tom went for, and soon returned with an extra lariat, one end of which he bound around the tree.

The dead Indians were, one by one, stood up against the trunk by Joe—Tom keeping the rope winding tightly about them to keep them in position.

As soon as the Indians were in position, the Rangers returned to the opening where they had left their horses, and threw themselves down on the green sward to rest, except Kit, who, walking slowly up and down, broke out with:

"Boys, my mind is made up; I shall enter the Comanche camp to-night as soon as the darkness favors my design, and either rescue Mary from the fiends or find a way to relieve her mind by letting her know we're on the trail. You both can go to sleep. I could not take a wink at such a time as this. I'll go and get a paint-bag from one of the dead Indians, and if need be I can disguise myself."

"Now, see here, Kit!" exclaimed Tom; "yer gittin' risky to think of such a danged dangerous job as that; wait till ther boys cum."

"That's talking sense, Tom," returned Joe, warmly; "Kit, I don't see why you can't listen to reason. The boys will ride like a double-bar-reled norther, and will get here before morning if nothing has happened to the Tonkaway."

"All the tongue you can both sling," said Kit, decisively, "would not alter me one iota in my determination to release or relieve that girl's mind. I can play my points alone easier than with company. You'll see Kit will come out right side up with care."

With that Kit parted the bushes and disappeared after the paint-bag, and to take a look about the ford and also up the trail toward the Indian camp.

"Waal, Joe," said Tom, sadly, "Kit are the dog-gonedest, stubbornest human I ever run ag'in'; he's wuss than a Arkansas mule. Thar ain't no use slingin' any hard or soft talk at him; he'll go, you bet! I see him crawlin' thru that cussed Injun camp now, thar ar' I know jist how he'll do it; but I say, Joe, let's take a

little snooze, an' wake up ready fur blood an' thunder, fur it's comin', bet yer last bit."

"I'm always ready, Tom," answered Joe; "I'll coil me noble form up on the emerald-fringed banks of the rippling Medina and dream of me true love in the Alamo city, and of the Lone Starry hours we've passed together. *Buenas noches!* Oh! I forgot, it's daylight. 'Happy be thy dreams,' old pard. *Adios!*"

"I ain't so danged soft as ter dream," muttered Tom; "when I go in fur a reg'lar genuine old snooze I take it and don't spile it with dreams. I sleep so little I can't afford 'em. Dreams is a luxury, pard; go to sleep."

It was not five minutes before both of the exhausted Rangers were in a deep sleep, which comes only to those who pass their life in the open air, and who are almost constantly in the saddle.

In the meantime Kit found everything quiet, procured the paint-bag, and then came silently back to the hiding-place.

Anxiously he looked at the sun to note the passage of time, and with eager longing he waited for the dark shadows of night to fall in sable hue upon the prairie.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GRAVE IN THE WOOD.

IT was not half an hour after the Tonkaway Indian left the ruined ranch of Will Halliday before a large half-breed horse, saddled and bridled, came galloping wildly through the post-oaks, with half a dozen Mexicans in hot pursuit.

It was the same animal which Will had ridden the previous night up to his cabin door, when chased by the Comanche Indians, and which he had been forced to let loose as he sprung in to defend his wife and children.

This horse was a favorite of Will's, and had been made a great pet of by all about the house. He had evidently wandered to the prairie, where he had joined the herd belonging to his master, and upon the appearance of the Mexican bandits, who strove hard to capture him, had stampeded for the ranch.

The bandits were not twenty yards behind the horse as he dashed snorting up to Will's side by the grave.

The lasso of the robber who was in the lead was whirling over his head as he caught sight of Will's wild, haggard face, the grave, and the dead Indians scattered about with gaping wounds and covered with gore.

The Greasers took in the horrible scene in an instant and comprehended the situation. Their pallid cheeks became of a deadly hue as Will, looking more like a corpse than a living human being, arose from the grave and gave them a look which caused them to send the long howls of their spurs into the flanks of their mustangs; when, whirling, they bounded with cries of fear and horror back through the timber, on the same trail they had come, not even daring to cast a look behind them in their headlong flight.

The coming of the faithful steed had the effect of breaking the terrible spell which had bound Will to his dead.

He knelt down in the grave, and kissed his dear murdered darlings, and in a trembling manner spread over them masses of moss, and then filled up the grave in a careful, tender kind of way.

Will then proceeded to a large pile of dry split rails, and picking out some of the heaviest, he carried them and put them parallel to each other over the resting-place of his loved ones, to protect them from the wolves.

The horse cropped the grass about the grave, at times jerking up his head and twisting his ears around, as if suspicious of the return of his would-be captors, and at others looking wonderingly at his master. There are some horses that seem to have more than human knowledge, and this was one of them.

After Will had covered the grave to his satisfaction, he raised his clenched hands toward heaven, and muttered to himself, as if recording a vow of vengeance against those who had cast upon him such unbearable misery.

He then seated himself again by the grave, and remained, with his head clasped in his hands, his elbows resting on his knees, until the shadows of night once more fell about his ruined home, and the owls began to hoot, as if deriding his misery, in the branches of the post-oaks overhead.

He then sprung to his feet and bounded like an enraged panther out among the dead Indians.

One by one he grasped them by hair and belt, and hurled them with a giant's strength upon the huge pile of rails.

In the belt of one he found his revolvers, which he quickly transferred to his scabbards again, together with a large bowie-knife.

In a few moments the corpses of the Comanches were all lying in a mixed heap upon the rails.

Will then gathered a quantity of dry twigs and leaves, struck a fire with his flint and steel, and igniting the kindlings, with a ghastly, gratified, revengeful smile, he with folded arms, awaited until the flames flashed up all

around and about the bodies of those who had been the cause of his ruin.

As the flames leaped up in fiery forks—at times flaring one side, as the breeze struck them—the forms of his enemies could be distinctly seen, when, with a maniac laugh, Will Halliday would leap into the air, and send wild yells ringing through the darkness which surrounded him.

CHAPTER IX.

BIG FOOT WALLACE AND HIS IRISH PARD.

THE Tonkaway and his white companions rode at a headlong speed through the chaparral without speaking a word to each other, and before ten o'clock were at Pleasanton's ford on the Medina river.

Down the bank they went, splashing into the rushing waters.

The night so far had been as dark as it could be, but the ground was well known to all three.

The horses buried their noses eye deep in the cool stream to quench their thirst, and the moon, just peeping up at their backs, cast a thousand silver rays, flitting through the branches of the bottom timber over their heads; but the waters of the Medina rolled on in inky blackness.

Jack's lips were just parting to make some remark to Clown, when the deep silence of the night was broken by a growling voice, which could only have proceeded from the lungs of a man of gigantic stature.

The words seemed hurled down upon them like boulders of rock.

"Who ther deuce are ye? White, red, or yaller? Spit her out rite pert an' lively, or yer won't nary one of yer strike dirt this side ther ford! Reckon I boss ther Medina jist about now—that's when I'm here."

As our friends gazed up the bank from whence the voice proceeded, on the opposite side, the forms of a man and horse, both of immense size, were distinctly outlined against the moonlit sky, almost over their heads—seemingly much larger than they really were from the position they occupied and the moonlight. As they looked up, the moon's rays glanced brightly along a rifle-barrel held in the hands of the rider, and pointed directly down upon them.

It was but a moment of silent astonishment, a sudden gripping and elevating of rifles, with our friends, and then came a loud and prolonged laugh from Jack, and his answer rung out:

"See here, Big Foot, I reckon yer kinder puttin' on extra airs. Does yer drive on this line? Draw up yer shooter, an' save ther charge; it's needed bad up ther creek. If yer boss ther Medina yer make a danged poor job of it, ter allow such goin's on as has happened up the creek. Jist you 'low yer animile tew balk rite thar till we drive up. Come on, boys!"

All three, with much scrambling and falling back, finally gained the high bank above, and rode up to the burly horseman, who made each cringe with pain as he gave them a hearty gripe of the hand.

The giant horseman, whom our trio of friends had so opportunely met, was no other than Big Foot Wallace, noted as one of the most successful rangers and scouts on the Texas frontier.

He was of giant build, with very large feet for even a man of his size.

The extensiveness of his understandings had gained for him the *sobriquet* of Big Foot, and few men, women, or children on the south, or south-west borders of Texas, but knew him personally or by reputation.

He was clad in a complete suit of tattered buck skin, made by his own hands, in rude frontier style; his long, dark-brown hair and grizzly beard gave him a rough, wild appearance; but when you looked in his eyes you felt sure that he was a man you could trust in any emergency, even with your life. A broad-brimmed, black sombrero, was slouched carelessly on the back of his head; and his belt contained two large, old-fashioned Colt's revolvers. A huge bowie-knife and a Sharp's rifle, made up his fit-out in the way of arms.

His horse was a powerful bay half-breed, well suited to bear his noble rough-and-ready rider.

As Big Foot gave the hand of the Tonkaway a wring, he exclaimed:

"Boys! I'll bet my panther ag'in' a kayote, that thar's mischief sumwhar, an' not more'n a day's lope from this, or that Tonk wouldn't be a-billin' round with ye; I never yet seen that cuss but what I had tew do some tall shootin'. What's up? I was jist a-goin' ter San Antonio, tew lay up a month's store of coffee an' terbacca."

"Afore I let's yer know what's on ther way-bill," answered Jack, "I'd like ter know whar yer been drivin', fur a week past?"

"Waal, Jack," responded Big Foot, "I've had jist ther wust run of danged ague I ever had; been housed in my ranch an' shook 'bout all ther straw off ther ruff; but, sling yer news, fur I'm sp'ilin' fur sumthin' fresh."

"Yer won't feel so well, when I tell yer," returned Jack, in a mournful tone, "but it's got ter cum out. The reds are on the rampage above here up ther creek; they've killed, and scalped Cotton's folks, Will Halliday's wife, baby, an' old lady, and got Molly, the 'Rose of

the Medina,' prisoner. Ther Tonk cum fur us, an' I'm mighty glad we met yer, fur yer wanted bad. Ther's only Kit, Tom, an' Joe on the trail so fur."

"By ther blood o' Crockett!" exclaimed Big Foot, madly, "if the red cusses hav' dun this—if ther hell-hounds hav' ruined Will, my hate is doubled, and it were keen afore. I've toddled that baby on my knee; my hand has gripped Will's in friendship, an' so help me 'Gehosiphath,' henceforth I'm his pard in vengeance. Lead on fur life or death!—but, hold a moment. I've got an Irish pard what I picked up a moon ago; can't leave him; he's sleepin' in the brush—"

With that Big Foot spurred his horse about twenty yards up the road, bent down in his saddle, grasped a man still half asleep upon the ground, sat him astride of a horse that was feeding near, gave him a shake, put the bridle in his hand, and in a loud, threatening voice, cried:

"See here, Larry, yer better rouse yerself mighty speedy, or I'll leave yer whar ye'll lose yer sculp. Come on, if yer goin' with me; thar's hard ridin', but a heap of fun on ther end on't."

Saying this, Big Foot put spurs to his horse, and dashed back again to the party on the bank of the river, yelling before he reached them:

"Lead on, Tonk! we're arter ye like hungry wolves, an' twice as desperate;" and all four disappeared beneath the shadows of the oaks up the river.

The Irishman rubbed his eyes a moment, gazed up into the moonlit heaven, gave a heavy yawn, and turned his head toward the fast-disappearing form of Big Foot.

"Rouse yerself, is it, Mister Big Huff? an' be jabbers it's all the time I'm after bain' roused. Yeas don't mind the time of night at all at all. Hard riding, is it? Pon me soul I'm after thinkin' it's hard riding whin ye are all the time at it; an' as to the fun I'm sure yeas has strange ideas of that same. What's that he was saying? Begorra! he'd lave me here to lose me sculp, that's me hair, skin an' all. Git up, ye devil av a horse, or I'll broke yer back will me stick. Bedad, what was I saying? Devil a stick have I but a gun what kocks me sines away ever a time it spits fire. The curse on that same gun! Sure my arm is near broke wid it. Git up, ye devil av a baste! dident ye hear Big Huff sayin' we'd be scalped?" And Larry yanked the bridle-rein, and struck the animal a violent blow with his gun.

The horse bounded snorting into the road, and down toward the ford; then halted so suddenly on the brink of the bank, that Larry only saved himself from being precipitated down the steep into the river by clutching with a desperate gripe the cantle of the saddle behind him.

"Be the holy Moses!" yelled the frightened Irishman, "are yeas making belave yeas didnt see where to go? Do yeas want to get rid of me? Now, by the powers o' pewter, ye'll jist take yerself up the strame mighty lively, fur I hears the crackin' ev bushes whare the big scout hav' gone. Ye'll take yerself that way, an' walk after him, Iavin' ye alone to be sculped."

The animal whirled half-around, almost unseating his rider again, and then dashed on after the Rangers, and was soon within easy speaking distance; but the deep shadows, made more dark and somber by the streaks of moonlight, the galloping forms ahead of his friend Big Foot, whose characters he did not know and whose presence he could not account for, drowned all desire in the Irishman for conversation, and he did not even whisper to his horse, as was his custom.

A few hours of hard riding brought them near the ruined ranch of Will Halliday, and the wild yells which struck their ears, together with the bright light of a fire, caused them to quicken their pace to a faster lope.

As they burst through the bushes, which bordered the clearing in which the cabin had stood, a most strange scene broke upon their view.

A human form which all recognized as Will Halliday, was outlined against the fire, made by the pile of rails; the dead Indians were nearly consumed, and Will, his face painted blood-red with vermilion found in a paint-bag taken from an Indian, his hair decorated with the gaudy head-dress of a warrior, was feeding the fire with wood from the corral, and as he would hurl a large post into the flames uttered yells that would have honored any of the braves whose bodies he was now burning to ashes.

All brought their horses to a sudden halt at the strange, wild scene, and Big Foot exclaimed, in a deep voice of surprise and grief:

"Boys, this beats anything I ever yet seen; it kinder knocks me; why! I'll never sculp another red if Will ain't wild."

"Ye're right, Big Foot," returned Jack. "I didnt expect ter find things quite so mixed. He's wilder'n a wounded panther, an' I reckon he alwis will be, by ther look of him."

Larry, with pale face and chattering teeth, kept his horse near the border of the woods, crossing himself religiously and muttering:

"Be the holy St. Patrick, what sort ev a cunthry is this? Sure, that must be the divel himself, an' he's after startin' a young hell here

in Texas, and bedad! I'm thinkin' they need it bad."

"Cum on!" shouted Big Foot. "Cum on, boys! We can't linger on ther trail."

All the party at this galloped up to the fire near Will, who was dancing and yelling around the bright blaze, which gave him a weird appearance, as the livid light played upon his wild, painted features.

"See here, Will, old boy," called Big Foot; "cum with us and pay back blood fur blood. Don't you know the reds has got Mollie? Cum on an' go for 'em like a man."

Seeing no sign that Will knew him, he turned to the Indians:

"Reckon yer war foolin' 'bout a big fight here; don't see no corpses. Whar are ther reds what were knocked under?"

"Heap Comanche kill!" answered the Tonkaway. "Will burn in fire."

"Oh, ho! *that's* it, are it?" exclaimed Big Foot. "Cum on, boys; leave him here; now to save Mollie, 'the Rose of the Medina,' or ter die."

CHAPTER X.

KIT KEEPS HIS WORD.

It is one of those morning hours when the god of sleep holds mankind most closely in his arms; it is the hour when the sleep of the living most resembles that of the dead.

It is the darkest hour of the night, for the moon, as if to favor him who is on an errand of mercy—at the risk of his life—has hid her face behind the dun clouds.

The Comanche camp is wrapped in gloom, for the fires are smoldering and veiled partially in their own ashes. Two score of human forms lie in the close embrace of sleep, their hands still red with innocent blood. Here and there around the Indian encampment may be seen the form of a warrior, standing immovable as a statue, guarding his brother butchers.

Some are leaning against trees, seemingly asleep, but their snakelike eyes are here, there and everywhere; for should one of these appointed guardians of safety so far forget himself and peril his brother braves by falling asleep he would be disgraced forever; his shield and lance might be decorated with a hundred scalps, he might have done many brave deeds to recite in his death-song, but all would be as naught; henceforth he would be a squaw-brave, and the finger of scorn would be pointed at him by all.

Just opposite the shelter of blankets in which "The Rose of the Medina" lays bound are stretched several braves, among them Bear Claw, while one sits, a grim sentry, at the opening.

Back of the shelter, not ten feet away, crawling like a snake, feeling every inch before him ere he ventures to worm himself along, removing every twig that would betray his presence by breaking under him—comes Kit Carson, Jr., his teeth set, his eyes glaring with suppressed passion, for he can hear distinctly the sobs and moans of Mary, who is suffering greatly from her cramped position and the way she is bound.

Kit has passed safely the outposts of the Indian guard; will he be so favored through all his movements? God grant that he may!

The most delicate work of his dangerous undertaking is before him. How will he make Mary understand that he is a friend? Will she not think him an Indian and shriek with alarm—raise the camp and doom him, she loves so well, to a horrible death?

Kit is equal to the emergency. It is an easy thing for him to loosen a peg which holds a portion of the blanket; the latter is soft and pliable, and luckily it does not crackle as a dry skin shelter would. His hand, then head, then half of his body are wormed beneath the blanket. His eyes endeavor to bore into the darkness. The Indian sentry is between him and the glow of a smoldering fire; it is enough; he can see his outlines.

Mary is not three feet from him; her arms are outstretched with the wrists bound to stakes driven in the earth; her limbs are secured in the same way.

With a touch as gentle as a brave man touches a babe, Kit's hand falls upon the calico sleeve of his darling, and is then raised above it so as not to touch the arm itself, and then passes slowly through the darkness, for he has found which way the arm is extended. He strikes, as he has calculated, the stake to which it is bound; he knows the hand is not three inches below his. He slowly detaches from his hunting-shirt a silver star and reaches out to the stake again. Will the cool metal when he drops it into her hand startle Mary, and betray him?

He presses the star between his hot palm to overcome the difficulty.

The cold sweat stands in big beads upon his forehead; he becomes desperate; he nerves himself for a sudden spring should she alarm the camp, and then places the silver in Mary's hand.

Most fortunately her hand is so benumbed that the knowledge that something strange is clasped in her fingers comes slowly to her through feeling, owing to the tightness of the cords about her wrists.

The talisman does not startle her; as she feels it she knows it to be the "Lone star of Texas," and connects it with the Rangers who wear it; she knows that a friend is near!

Kit gently puts his hand in hers.

Thank God! He feels a pressure of recognition from her.

Slowly, and with the stealthy caution of a panther he draws himself along and presses his lips to hers—his long black hair falling about her tear-stained face. His keen knife, followed by his fingers to guide it, severs the cruel cords which bind her arms and limbs, and then they are folded an instant in each other's arms; then Kit presses her loved form back again to earth. Not a word is spoken. A whisper would betray him to his death.

The Indian guard must die; that is evident to Kit, before he can do anything more; and he must not only kill him without noise but risk the piercing eyes of the guards around the camp while doing the deed. It is a desperate game, but he must play it for so fair a winning.

The camp is silent as death as Kit crawls behind the brave. His right hand clutches his long glittering bowie; his left stealthily glides up the Indian's back; just clearing his quiver of arrows.

The piercing shriek of a panther to the south of the camp attracts the Indian's attention; also that of the guards outside.

Kit's hand goes suddenly over the shoulder of the sentry, and with lightning quickness closes over the Indian's mouth, bringing his head back against his own breast; at the same instant the glittering steel enters the warrior's heart.

A convulsive throb, a contraction of the limbs, and the red-man's spirit is free of its earthly tenement.

Kit now drops to the earth, braces up the body in the same position by means of a roll of blankets, and then draws back into the shelter once more, and folding Mary in his arms, whispers hoarsely:

"Mary, darling, be calm, or all is lost. I've killed the sentinel, but a hundred dangers beset our path between here and safety. Can you use your limbs, my poor dear?"

"Oh! Kit, my dearest, may God ever bless you! I implore you, pray you to return the way you came, for I have not strength to accompany you. You can escape alone, but you cannot if embarrassed by me, in my exhausted state. Fly if you love me—fly while you can with safety, and perhaps with help you can yet take me from the clutches of these red monsters."

"Mary," whispered Kit, firmly, "if I leave you it will be because my time has come. We will live or die together, love."

With that, Kit gathered her weak trembling form in his arms and cautiously crawled out from the shelter. He gave a hurried glance about the camp, and made his way slowly through the bushes and trees by the same trail he had come.

Proceeding only a short distance, he laid Mary upon the grass, and whispering to her to be as quiet as death, and that he would return soon, he left her.

Not twenty yards from where Mary lay an Indian stood leaning against a tree. Kit's trail lay past this brave; therefore this sentry must die, too. The Indian's back was against the oak, and he was facing the prairie, so Kit approached him from behind, and with a sudden spring placed his hand over his mouth, and drove his bowie to his heart.

But, horrors! his hand slipped from the Indian's mouth, when the terrible death-yell rung out sharp and clear through the dark night air.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE SCALPS FOR THE TONKAWAY.

"JOE!" exclaimed Tom, in a smothered voice which showed surprise and shame at having overslept himself, springing from his blanket; "Joe! I'm eternally bum-foosed ef 'tain't night. Wake up, pard! We're a couple o' mighty slim kind of scouts, I'm thinkin'."

"Methinks I hear an angel voice break in upon me dreams," drawled Reckless Joe, as he sat up on his blanket. "Night, is it? Yes, I observe. Well, night is the time for sleep. Why didst thou disturb me slumbers, me lord duke? I'm weary; I would rest. By the way, Tom, where is his Royal Highness, Kit Carson, Jr.?"

"I don't see the galoot," answered Tom; "here is his rifle, an' his nag are with ours. Joe, them's the most sensible mustangs ever wore tails; they're all flat on ther grass takin' a rest, provin' that no reds are on the sneak this-a-way."

"Tom!" broke in Joe, in great agitation, springing to his feet, "Kit is in the Indian camp. I remember now, don't you, that he swore he would go alone? He's made a miss of it, I feel it in my bones, and we're tied to this spot in spite of ourselves. It would be pure madness for us to venture after him until Raven and the boys get here."

"Yer right, Joe," cried Tom, impatiently drawing up his belt an extra hole; "Kit's kept his word, sure as yer born. I tole yer he war wuss ner a mule. Tell yer what, Joe, I'm

danged blue about ther gills, an' mighty afraid we're in a tight fix. If Kit is gobbled up, an' the Tonk don't cum ter time, I wouldn't give a prickly pear for our top-knots. About what time does yer reckon it is?"

"It's after the witching hour of midnight. We had a long snooze, pard."

As Joe ceased speaking he crossed the little opening, and examined his rifle, wiping off the dew with a piece of buckskin.

Tom was just filling his pipe, preparatory to having a smoke, when both Rangers were startled by the horses springing suddenly to their feet and pointing their ears down the river in the attitude of listening.

In an instant Tom and Joe were, with rifles cocked, facing in the same direction, with every faculty on the alert.

"What's in the wind now, pard?" whispered the astonished Tom. "I don't like this danged way o' doin' things. I'd 'farnel sight rather face ther music."

"Hark! Tom," said Joe, impatiently; "it comes from down the river; it's the Tonk and the boys; I hope to Heaven it is."

The dull rumble of horses in a swift gallop up the river-bottom sward reached their ears; the sound came nearer and nearer, until they knew it was from the opposite side of the stream.

The crashing and cracking of brush, and then comparative silence, told the Rangers, as well as if they saw the strangers, when they entered the clear space near the ford.

"Cum on, Joe, lively!" cried Tom. "We'll scout through this brush an' get a sight at them, an' be ready for biz. Cum on!"

The two Rangers in another moment were parting the bushes on the bank and gazing earnestly to the south side of the stream.

Big Foot Wallace, Jack, Clown, Larry, and Raven, just then rode up the bank, but it was so dark that only those who were accustomed to night-watching, like Tom and Joe, could have made out their character.

One instant the new-comers sat their horses on the bank, peering over into the dusky shades of the opposite shore, and then if a bomb-shell had exploded in their midst they could not have scattered in a more lively manner.

The Tonkaway and Big Foot had discovered the Indians who were bound to the tree!

Not a living form of horse or man could now be seen by Joe and Tom.

The latter tore his sombrero from his head, and jammed the felt rim into his mouth, struck Joe a violent blow in the back, then rolled over and over in the grass, convulsed with laughter which he could barely restrain within bounds.

A low quiet chuckle from Joe, who held both hands over his mouth, showed that in spite of the desperate situation they were in he also enjoyed the joke they had played on their pards.

Once more they parted the bushes, and it was a difficult matter to restrain a yell, as they saw the Tonkaway and Big Foot crawling along the bank on hands and knees, their rifles ready to pour death into the already dead Indians, bound to the tree.

To do them justice they were more puzzled than alarmed; they did not understand why the reds should stand boldly against the tree guarding the ford, and not make a demonstration when they had been in plain view, but they were not long to remain in doubt.

The rifle of Big Foot was leveled, and the revolver of the Tonkaway pointed at the dead Indians, as were the rifles of the rest of the party, below the other side of the trail, when Raven gave a warning-cry. Springing down the bank at the same time into the water and swimming across the river, in a moment he stood by the tree, and was seen by his party, to be quietly scalping the silent guards, while in a low, unearthly voice he sung the war-song of his tribe.

"Boys!" exclaimed Big Foot, as Jack, Clown and the trembling Larry gathered around him and gazed over the river at the Tonkaway securing the trophies he prized so dearly—"I hav' had two set-backs ter-night; down thar below, seeing Will bakin' Injuns, on ther half-shell, as ther Powder-horn fellers say, an' here I've been wuss fooled 'n I ever ware afore. Things are gittin' sorter mixed an' I can't even count on myself. Sumthin' 's goin' ter happen that'll fotch us up a-standin' right pert. My sculp don't feel any looser'n usual; but I'll own I feel queer at ther ruts o' my hair. Cum on! Mount yer critters an' let's prospect over t'other side."

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE BRINK OF THE GRAVE.

BUT to return to Kit, whom we left in the Comanche camp.

The death-yell of the Indian guard made twenty pair of glittering eyes flash upon the fleeing form of Kit, and in a moment after he had snatched Mary from the ground, a score of Indians were in hot pursuit. Arrows went hissing past his head, and tomahawks whirled through the air.

Kit brought Mary around in his front to shield her, and found she had fainted; he pressed his lips to hers for the last time, for he knew there was no escape, incumbered as he was with

the maiden, but death to him was preferable to leaving her.

"My race is about run," muttered Kit, "but I'll send a few ahead of me," and dropping Mary at his feet, he jerked two Colt's revolvers from his belt, and sent, in quick succession, the twelve shots into the pursuing forms who were bounding fast on his trail; then throwing the pistols into a thicket, so they would not be made use of by the reds, he once more took Mary in his arms, and ran through the timber.

The red devils still yelled behind him; they came nearer and nearer, for he could not go fast with his burden; he knew he could go but a short distance more; death was better for poor Mary than what was in store for her. A muttered prayer was upon his lips as an arrow pierced him, and a tomahawk striking him in the head, he fell senseless to the ground.

Wild yells of triumph burst from the throats of a dozen braves as they surrounded the inanimate forms of Mary and Kit. Answering yells came from other points, where the Indians had run to cut off the fugitives, and in a short time the little opening was filled with warriors.

A torch was brought from the camp, and Kit was rolled over on his back, showing to the astonished Indians the well-known and much-feared features of the Eagle Eye, Carson, who had slain so many of their tribe!

Those who had taken hold of him drew back an instant with dread, so much was he feared, and so well known were his great bravery and cunning.

One prolonged, joyful yell came from the assembled braves as Kit was recognized.

He was at once securely bound, although apparently dead, and taken into camp, followed by a party bearing the still senseless form of Mary, who was returned to the shelter and secured in the same manner as before.

Kit was bound to the young pecan tree, which stood solitary and alone in the center of the encampment.

The moon once more appeared from behind the black cloud and lit up the scene, and showed an Indian pouring a gourd of water on the head of Kit, which partly washed the blood and paint from his face, and brought him back to his senses.

Black Wolf and Bear Claw, the Comanche chiefs, stood before him with folded arms, and with a sneering, triumphant expression on their faces.

Kit braced himself up, and threw back his long black hair from his forehead and face by a nervous toss of his head.

His wild eyes glared, and he glanced tauntingly around the mass of warriors, and then his gaze rested upon the two chiefs before him, who could not help but quail as Kit's piercing eyes gazed fearlessly into theirs.

Black Wolf being the ranking chief, spoke first, in a scoffing manner:

"Eagle Eye Carson, big brave—but he go blind—why come in night—steal squaw from Black Wolf camp? Eagle Eye kill many Comanche braves—but he has take last scalp—let him sing death-song—the Medina wolves gnaw his bones 'fore moon grows small—his white squaw bring wood, bring water for Comanche chief—on big plain."

"You lie! you cowardly son of a coyote," hissed Kit, "you red murderers of squaws and papposes, you dare not meet me in fair field. Loosen these bonds and I'll fight the whole of you; let me die as I have lived, with death-yells of Comanches sounding in my ears like sweet music. Dogs—wolves of the prairie! I scorn and spit upon you! Harm but a hair of the poor girl's head you have made miserable for life and the hand of the Great Spirit shall fall in wrath upon your people. Comanche braves shall crawl like cowardly coyotes, and feed upon the bones that Texans have left behind. The ground shall shake and open; your villages shall be swallowed up, and you shall burrow to hide yourselves with shame!" Kit's words were flung out like molten lava among the Indians, and his prophecy made them for a moment cringe with fear, which gave way to madness, as the insults were heaped upon them in so taunting and daring a manner by a man who was bound hand and foot.

"Eagle Eye words big," exclaimed Bear Claw; "does he dream? Look around—red-men thick as grass on prairie—Eagle Eye is alone—where are his fast-shooting guns? His hands are tied—he soon take big trail—let him sing his death-song—he great brave—have big fire—die like warrior."

"Fighter of squaws!" yelled Kit, with madness in his voice, "give me the chance to die like a warrior; cut me loose and give me arms and I'll go on the long dark trail like a man, but I'll not go alone; the death-howl of a score of your devils shall go with me. Loose me! I say, and I'll show you how a Texan can die."

"Eagle Eye kill no more red-men," retorted Black Wolf; "a warrior does not grow in a day that he let loose great scout on his people. Eagle Eye has made last trail—no more see his tracks on big plain—look at moon—never see moon more—sun shine on Eagle Eye ashes—he die where he stand."

Then the chief turned suddenly to his warriors and asked, angrily:

"Where White Horse and braves?—are blind, no see Eagle Eye swim Medina."

"White Horse and braves," shouted Kit, exultantly, "will never again join in the war-dance. Their death-yells were sweet music to the hungry coyotes of the Medina. The knife of Eagle Eye has drank their hearts' blood; their death-song must be howled by the squaws in your far-away villages. Eagle Eye gave them no time; his knife does not stop half-way when a Comanche dog is before him."

A score of hands went quickly for knife and hatchet, arrows were fitted to bows with lightning-like movements, and angry scowls and bloodthirsty yells; but a commanding voice caused them all to return their weapons.

"Warriors," exclaimed the chief; "braves of the big plain, shall Eagle Eye die quick death? No! we must see him cry like squaw when hot fire first touch him. Put up arms! No shoot Eagle Eye. White Horse dead—Eagle Eye red with blood—Eagle Eye shall die—torture fire make great squaw—I have spoken," and waving his hand he dispersed the warriors to their respective camp-fires.

The guards were doubled, and once more the Indian camp was wrapped in silence, as the braves rolled themselves in their blankets to sleep the remaining hours of darkness away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAD AVENGER.

As Big Foot and his party were riding through the ford, the Tonkaway was just running his scalping-knife around the head of the last Indian, in the death ring about the tree, when he was grasped from behind by the huge black bear which had previously played a part in the death of the Comanches.

Raven knew in an instant the fix he was in, as the huge claws clasped about him, and by a sudden twist brought himself about to face the bear, before the powerful claws met too closely around his breast.

With another desperate struggle, in which his sinews were stretched to their utmost tension, he succeeded, being on the edge of the bank, in throwing himself and the bear over the brink, and the two rolled over and over down into the water, the knife of Raven being driven between the animal's ribs to the hilt, as often as the Indian could get room to swing his arm.

Both rolled down and disappeared beneath the dark waters, in plain view of Big Foot and his party, as they were in the river crossing.

"Waal!" shouted Big Foot, in an excited and astonished manner, "if this don't beat ther devil! What in ther name of Crockett, are cum-in' next? It's a danged queer time fer ther Tonk to be b'ar-huntin', but I reckon by ther way things looks ther b'ar war a-huntin' ther Tonk. That animile must be an old 'quaintance an' he's a mighty 'fectionate cuss; he's soft on ther red, an' heavy on ther hug. Look a-thar, boys; by the way that water b'iles reckon they're havin' a reg'lar fandango, but ther drink kinder shets off ther music. I ain't at all skeered 'bout ther Tonk; he's full o' grit an' game till ther last. Reckon that bear 'll never hang 'round another bee-tree. Hurra! Thar's our Tonk! jist a claw-in' up ther bank down below thar, and yer can jist bet that b'ar are fish-bait by that. Cum on, boys; our horses 'll get chilled; it ar' time we war t'other side."

"Sure, Misther Big Fut," exclaimed Larry, in a terrified manner, "I'm thinkin' it's meself that'll go back beyont to the ranch. I'm not falin' at all well; am not used to sayin' such heathenish things, as I have seen this night. God kape me frum ever passin' another sich! Begorrah, it's a fool I was, to ever Pave ould Ireland. How far does the likes of ye call it to the salt say, from this beast of a place? Sure, I'm famished fur fude, an' dyin' fur slape; but I c'd nather ate nor rist wid sich murtherin' sights about me."

"Waal, Larry," said Big Foot, a broad grin overspreading his face, "make a blue streak back, if yer want, but yer can jist stop at ther place Wild Will war cookin' Injuns an' tell that beauty to cum up this-a-ways, an' give us a hand an' fight in yer place."

"Howly muther o' Moses! I clean furgit him entirely, bedad! but I'd face a dozen devils wid you b'ys afore I'd go alone within a mile ev him. I'm thinkin' I can't stur wid any safety to meself, anyhow, an' I'm forced to stay wid yez, anyhow," and Larry, jerking his head about in every direction, as if expecting some new horror, spurred his horse, and scrambled up the opposite bank with the others, and they halted their animals, all dripping with water, by the tree which supported the dead Comanches.

"Ther boys hav' gone in heavy right on ther jump fur reg'lar biz," declared Big Foot, "but, whar in thunderation are they a-hidin' the'rsel's—"

At this moment Tom and Joe, with a low whistle of caution, sprung into the midst of the party; and the Tonkaway looking wet and fatigued joined them, coming fresh from his struggle with the bear.

No allusion was made by the boys in regard to the laughable mistake their ards had made, when they had discovered the dead Indians,

as they knew Big Foot would feel sore on the subject.

"Mighty glad ter see yer, boys," welcomed Tom; "we need yer right now if ever. Kit hav' gone on a lone scout inter ther camp o' ther reds in spite of all we c'd do, an' if he's gobbled it ain't no fault o' ours. I reckon with you boys we can make a clean sweep through them without gittin' corraled, an' if they've got Kit, as things look, why, they can't keep him frum this crowd, ner Mollie either. Howdy, Tonk? Hope yer hain't hurt my b'ar. What's ther difficult atween yer?"

"No like Raven take scalp," answered the Tonkaway. "Hug Raven tight, claws sharp. Raven knife more sharp—more long—find heart—gone down river—catfish eat him."

"How did yer clean out them reds?" interrupted Jack, addressing Tom.

"We lay off in ther brush," explained Tom, "an' knifed the whole caboodle. We hain't used no shootin'-irons since we've laid round here, ner slung no loose jaw. It's only three miles up to ther camp o' ther reds an' they're as bold an' brash as if they had a thousand braves."

"Waal, yer hav' harnessed a few on 'em up," returned Jack, "an' they don't 'pear tew kick ag'in' ther traces much. Six makes a good team; but them looks rather balky an' too badly spavined to draw much of a load," and Jack gave a quiet laugh while he punched Clown in the ribs.

Just at this moment the fusilade from the revolvers of Kit, as he laid Mary on the grass and fired into the savages who were pursuing them, struck the ears of the Rangers, ever acute, borne down, as the reports were, by the night breeze.

"By the blood of Crockett!" yelled Big Foot, "thar goes Kit's shooters! He's alone, boys, an' wants help. Mount for yer lives! A Texan! a Ranger! a White Man is fighting for his life! Sling yersel's ready fur blood an' vengeance, an' remember, no mercy! no quarter! an' split thar camp if thar's a thousand of 'em!"

There was a dashing and plunging of mustangs as Tom and Joe prepared to join the impatient party outside the bushes.

"Keep by my nag, Larry," cried Big Foot; "keep by me, an' shoot ther red cusses when yer can draw a bead. Yer'll soon git ter like it, an' it'll cum easy. Are yer ready, boys? One minute may lose a white man's life."

But his last words were drowned by a long, piercing, unearthly yell, that rung from the opposite river bank.

The moon broke free from the black cloud that had hung like a pall between it and the earth, showing to the astonished Rangers, who sat their horses, as if suddenly petrified, the form of Wild Will, the Red Trailer, upon his horse, who came bounding with maddening leaps and eyes protruding with terror.

The dreadful yell or scream of Will Halliday cut the night air, and sent a thrill of horror to the very marrow of those who awaited his coming, without sense enough left in them to clear the way.

Up the steep back sprung the terrified, panting steed, covered with foam, bearing his mad master.

On they came—Will's eyes staring straight before him, showing no sign that he saw his old friends and dashed past them at headlong speed through the oaks, and out into the prairie beyond, followed by the Rangers who halted as they cleared the bottom timber.

Larry, pale as death, his teeth chattering, kept in the midst of the Texans, grasping his saddle horn with the desperation of despair.

Wild Will turns his horse directly up the river and points for the Indian camp.

How does he know its location? No one has told him, and if such was the case he is too insane to understand.

No more horrible sight could be presented to the eye than Wild Will now going on a red trail for revenge!

The Indian head-dress, his hideously painted face, his long black hair flying in the wind, the fiendish, vengeful look in his eyes—his howls, shrieks and laughter, as he dashes along, all proclaim that the Red Trailer comes for blood!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RED TRAILER'S CHARGE.

In the Indian camp all are wrapped in slumber except the sentinels and the two captives—Kit and Mary Halliday.

The latter is suffering excruciating bodily pain; due to the manner in which she is bound. She had heard Kit's voice taunting the Indians, and the threats of Black Wolf. Her mind was filled, indeed, overburdened, with misery, before Kit made his visit to rescue her, in regard to the horrible treatment of her family, and now she has more to suffer than most human minds could stand; and prays that something may happen in her favor to relieve the great strain that is on her nerves, weakened as they are by want of food and sleep.

Kit's proud, brave spirit seems to have oozed out with the streams of blood that have, since his capture, poured from his wounds. For his head, so erect when hissing hot words at his captors, is now drooped upon his breast, the

flashing eyes are shaded by the quivering lids, while the long lashes rest upon his cheeks, through which hot, burning tears are washing trails through the blood and paint.

But the tears come not from sufferings of his own; they are brought out by the heartrending moans of her he loves better than his life, into whose tender flesh the tight-drawn cords are cutting as deep as her groans of anguish cut into his heart.

But a sudden commotion stirs the Comanche camp; sharp, quick signals of alarm are transmitted from sentinel to sentinel. A long, shrill, piercing shriek comes cutting through the air from down the river. Warriors spring from their blankets, grasp their weapons, listen, then look with wonder at each other, for they know by the sound that but a single horse is approaching the camp.

Brush and wood are thrown upon the fires, although the moon now makes the night almost as light as day.

On comes the sound of the clattering hoofs; the air is filled with yells so strange, so unlike anything they have ever heard before, that the Indians huddle together in superstitious terror.

On, on plunged, they knew not what.

The bushes and branches crack and bend, and out into the clearing, bursting from the thick border of trees, comes Wild Will—an apparition so unearthly, so horrible, so unlooked for, that quivering hands are unable to fit arrow to bow-string, and guns shake like the aspen.

So fiendish and wild is the vision which breaks unexpectedly upon them that braves who have never known fear gaze with amazement and dread at the madman and maddened horse.

One wild yell—in which were blended satisfaction and bitter hatred—sprung from the lips of Will, as he bounded in among the massed Indians, a revolver in each hand, and, with lightning rapidity, sent ball after ball on their errands of death.

Bear Claw sprung from the crowd, and in the confusion gained the shelter and dragged Mary out into the woods, thinking the father had come for his child, and by some means would take his captive from him.

Black Wolf, unable to form his braves, sprung toward Kit, his captive, whose eyes were taking note of everything in the strange scene before him.

The glittering steel flashed in his face, a muttered prayer was on his lips, as a ball from one of Wild Will's revolvers went crashing through the skull of the Comanche chief, who fell dead at the feet of his white enemy.

At the death of their chief, the Indians became desperate. Realizing that he who was dealing death upon all sides was mortal, and not, as they first supposed, an evil spirit from the other world, arrows and bullets now flew as thick as hail about and near Wild Will and Kit, as the former leaned down from his horse and ran his bowie-knife across the thongs which bound the latter to the torture-tree.

A dozen arrows hung from the thick Mexican blanket which was secured to Will's shoulders, and flying behind, and this blanket saved the maniac from death many times.

Before Kit could comprehend that Wild Will was cutting him free, a ball from an Indian rifle struck him, glancing and plowing a furrow along the side of his already bruised head, and rendering him senseless.

With a yell of triumph Will grasped Kit by the belt, and drew his senseless form up before him.

Howls of rage filled the air, and the Indians fought each other, endeavoring to make their way toward and prevent the escape of the two whites; but, having no leader, and being so demoralized, they were but a mixed, wrangling mob, falling over their own dead and wounded.

Wild Will turned in his saddle, and with an insane peal of laughter, drove his bowie into his horse.

The animal, with a scream of terror and pain, bounded with headlong speed clear of the Comanche camp, leaving near a score of dead and dying Indians to mark the passage of the Red Trailer.

The Indians were so confused at the death of so many of their comrades and their chief—all slain by one man—that they did not know they were on the eve of a more desperate encounter.

There was but a single exception, and that was the chief, Bear Claw.

Returning from the woods where he had secreted Mary, he saw Wild Will gallop toward the west with great speed, Kit hanging before him across the saddle, like a dead man. His warriors were, he knew, in a terrible state.

He paused an instant on the border of the wood, and glanced around. His sharp ears—he being some distance from the confusion of the camp—detected the sound of galloping horses coming from down the river, from the same point whence Wild Will had come dashing into the camp.

A few bounds brought him in a position where he distinctly saw, not a half-mile away, seven horsemen that he knew were white men.

He comprehended in a moment that it would be useless to try and get the Indians into any order to meet the charge of the Rangers. He

had seen enough of their fast-shooting guns to know that certain death would come to his people. With great speed Bear Claw immediately ran to where his favorite mustang was picketed, threw on saddle and adjusted a loup-rein in an instant; then, springing on his horse's back, he gave a warning yell to his comrades, which was drowned in the confusion and yells, and then rode back to where he had concealed Mary.

Once more he placed his captive before him in the saddle, and taking a northerly direction he urged his mustang to its greatest speed.

Weakened by suffering and horror, her senseless form, in the arms of a bloodthirsty savage, was borne one way as fast as a fleet prairie steed could go, while her hero lover, wounded and senseless, and nearer death than life, in the arms of a madman on a wild, terrified horse, flew over the prairie in another direction, unconscious of the yells and insane laughter which urged on the steed in its wild course.

CHAPTER XV.

THE TWO TRAILS.

"Ride up, Larry, an' show yer grit!" exclaimed Big Foot. "Boys, all ready with yer shooters! Remember that grave back ther'. Here we are! At 'em! give 'em hot lead."

With the Texas yell ringing like a knell to those before them, the Rangers drove their spurs deep into the flanks of their mustangs, and bounded through the trees and bushes into the midst of the Comanches, sending the lead from their revolvers hurtling through the doubly confused and scared mass of Indians.

The charge of Wild Will was a bewildering surprise, it was so strange and unexpected, but that of the seven scouts was a greater one.

The Indians were taken at a disadvantage, and it was a perfect massacre.

In ten minutes every Indian in sight was dead, or dying, for the red-skins, having no leader, many of them fled to the woods, wild with fright at the strange events of the night, and some who seemed to have lost all reasoning power, ran to the open prairie toward their horses, hotly pursued by the Rangers who shot them down.

All the mustangs of the war-party, besides many they had stolen from the ranches, were recaptured by the scouts and driven in near the camp.

"Where is Mary? Where is Kit?" was the cry of the Rangers, one to the other.

The shelter where the former was secured, and the tree where their pard had been bound, were found; but it was not light enough for them to find any clew which would show how the captives had been disposed of; so the Rangers were forced to await daylight before they could do anything.

The Rangers ascertained by an inspection of the camp that Wild Will had made a perfectly wonderful fight, by the number of dead lying almost in a mingled mass near the torture tree, to which Kit had been tied, and one and all gave the mad avenger the well-deserved name of the Red Trailer.

That Black Wolf had tried to kill Kit could be easily seen by the position of the chief's body. Not one of the Rangers escaped without a wound, some of a serious nature, or would have been so considered by any but men like themselves.

The mustangs of Larry and the Tonkaway were both killed in the latter part of the fight. Larry had kept near the giant scout, and after his blood got heated by the exciting scenes, his Irish fighting qualities showed themselves, and he went in with a will, using his gun as he would a shillelah, cracking skulls right and left; in fact Larry performed his part in a manner that called forth the praise of all, especially from Big Foot, who now paid particular attention to his "picked-up" pard.

When the Rangers found it impossible to ascertain by any trail or sign the whereabouts of either Kit or Mary, they seated themselves about one of the Indian camp-fires to rest from their long and hard ride, taken in the early of the night, well knowing that the sun would shortly show them sure signs of what had become of their friends.

The Tonkaway soon glided into the circle, and stood in the firelight a moment, casting a wandering glance around the camp, and then seated himself near Big Foot, exclaiming, in a satisfied manner:

"Good—have war council—what think—where Mary gone—where Kit gone—Comanche no kill—let Big Foot chief speak—Raven's ears open."

Keep yer eyes open, Tonk," said Big Foot, glancing around the camp, "fur sum o' them skulking smoky-skins might send ther cards in ther shape of a blue whistler in at us. We ain't bad targits, jist about now, 'round this here fire."

"Comanche gone," answered Raven; "pick up feet fast—way up river—no stop—much scare—heap 'fraid face shootin'-guns."

"Waal, ma'be so; yer oughter know thar natur": as tew whar they're gone, I'm bu'stin' my head a-thinkin' on. I can't put things right ter suit me. I'm ther wust mixed-up man in this crowd: never seen things turn out so danged

unnat'ral-like afore. What yer all thinkin' 'bout, boys?"

"I'll tell yer what's gliding through my brain-box," answered Tom Clark. "I hain't forgot them revolver-shots, what we heard when Kit war a-playin' a lone hand, an' I thought possibly, fact are, I put it up, as a dead sure thing that Kit got bad hurt, afore the reds tied him up, an' like enuf he had Mollie, jist a h'istin' hisself fur our camp, when he dun ther shootin'. Put this an' that together, an' I says he war in too bad a fix ter git away hisself, an' so somebody's gone an' tuck him."

"Thar's a heap o' sense in yer talk, Tom," said Big Foot; "but how about Mollie, she—"

"I have made up that item clear in my mind," interrupted Joe. "It is plain to see that the chief, Bear Claw, down below at the fight at Will's ranch, left his braves when we charged them, and run with Mary; now our not finding his dead body, I think he has taken Mary and left on the sly, leaving the Indians without a chief—in fact, has played the same hand he did at the ranch. Struck with Mollie's beauty, he's a-going to make her his squaw."

"Joe's words good," said Raven; "Joe's tongue straight—Tom good council talk—both great scout—"

"Boys!" cried out Jack Hodge, "one thing are sure—thar ain't no stage-route here, an' consequently they has gone off on two or four legs. The fust owin' ter weakness, ain't tew be thunk of, an' if they are bein' took away hossback, I reckon we has sum tall old ridin' afore us."

"Bet yer my interest in the Mexican Republic," broke in Clown, "that the reds, what stampeded from here, fetch up with another pack. They w'uldn't be so danged bold if thar warn't a big crowd within a day's ride or so, but, I'd like mighty well ter know whar it war Kit done his shootin'; 'tain't reasonable ter think any of ther de'd reds here in ther camp war knocked under by him. If he war takin' Mollie, he would 'a' made a streak fur ther ford, not this-a-way."

No sooner had Clown spoken, than Raven sprung to his feet, muttering:

"Raven heap big fool!" and glided out of the circle of fire-light past the blanket shelter, and disappeared in the darkness beneath the branches of the oaks.

"Keep on, boys; sling yer council talk, as ther Tonk says," exclaimed Big Foot. "Things are gittin' a little more clear, an' I reckon daylight'll show everything strait. It's gittin' light a little now whar the sun pops up. That Tonk are the whitest red I ever saw; I kind ter soften on him. Larry, I didn't allow, war wuth shucks, but he went in, as brash as a black wolf among buffler-calves. How duz yer feel, Larry?"

"Fale, is it?" answered Larry; "I'm a-falin' as wake an' faint as a new-born babe. Phat do the red devils do fur 'atin'? Sure I see nothin' ar'und that w'u'd keep a mouse from starvin' without he turns horse an' ates grass. Phat wur sich devils made fur, to bother us with howls an' yells an' the loike of that, let alone runnin' others mad wid grafe, and murderin' females widout marcy? Murdher an' turf, but it's meself that's thankin' the Vargin we has none sich in ould Ireland; but there might a-bin, long ago, and wore afther bairn banished wid the snakes be Saint Patrick, Heaven bless him! The curse on the red h'athen, for they has killed me horse, as dacent an' animile as ever was afther whiskin' a tail; an' a kind frind he was to me. I forgive him fur thryin' to sind me down the stape bank beyon'. I'm thinkin' he had a mind to commit shuoside, that time. God knows. Faith! he won't tell. Bedad a good horse is the best frind a man c'u'd hav' in this cuss ev a c'unthry, an' me heart's falin' sad, indade it is, for the loss ev him."

"Don't fret," Larry, said Big Foot; "you've got friends here what'll go ther life on yer. I like yer better fur yer thinkin' of yer critter; but, yer shall take yer pick outen the hull caboodle what we has got in the morning."

"And, Larry," added Joe, "I'll go and see if I can't corral some grub. I'm ashungry as you—all of us are; and it will be strange if I don't forage up some kind of eatables in as large a camp as this, if it ain't more'n some dried-beef," and Joe started on a tour of inspection, avoiding the heaps of dead Indians.

The Tonkaway now put in an appearance, and stood within the circle of firelight with folded arms, awaiting to be questioned.

"Waal, Tonk?" asked Big Foot, earnestly.

"Has yer struck anything fresh?"

"Yes," replied Raven, "me find where Eagle Eye shoot—kill Comanche—big fight—dark night—Eagle Eye great warrior—red-men run fast—throw hatchet—shoot arrow—hit Eagle Eye—he much blood lose—know nothin' when tie up—drag him on ground."

"Told yer so, boys!" cried Tom, quickly; "I knowed he w'u'd a-fit till he drapped, an' w'u'd keep 'em a-tarin' grass, as long as he could grip a shooter or bowie. I'm on ther anxious seat fur daylight, fur it's jist the danged thing whar he c'u'd a-scooted. His corpus ain't here, that ar' a comfort."

Reckless Joe now came up with a calf-skin sack of dried buffalo-meat, and again returned

to the north portion of the camp and brought on his back a bag of parched corn.

"There, boys," he exclaimed, with a satisfied smile, "there's grub. Pitch in, Larry, and forget your noble steed, or, if you can't do that, remember he died in a good cause. Gentlemen, I bid you to the feast; you are welcome, and it sha'n't cost you even a Texas land-warrant. Don't let the extensiveness of the bill of fare worry you; select your dishes and sail in."

Long before Joe had finished speaking all hands were eating like famished wolves, and Joe made a grab at each bag, filling his hat, remarking at the same time, in a hasty manner:

"It's very touching to see how delicate you are; you don't take your regular bitters, or ask grace before eating. Your eyes and hands are in league with your stomachs, that's plain."

"Talk less an' eat more!" exclaimed Big Foot, tearing a large hunk of buffalo-meat from a long string of the same in his hand; "set your grinders to work, an' h'ist in enuf feed ter keep yer stiff fur a sixty-mile run."

The gray streaks of approaching dawn appeared in the eastern horizon as the Rangers finished eating an amount of food that would have been sufficient for twenty men of in-door habits.

Clown, who had been guarding the stock, was relieved, and satisfied himself in the way of eating, afterward producing a huge coffee-pot which he had brought attached to his saddle and a small bag of Rio. When the fragrant aroma of the latter became diffused around, the Rangers all rushed back to the fire, producing the cups, and soon were joining Clown in drinking that much-prized beverage of all scouts.

"H'ist yerself this-a-ways, Tonk, an' set ter work; we hain't trod around enuf ter sp'ile ther sign. Thar's two p'int's," said Big Foot, "yer wants ter sling yerself on—ther blanket-tent whar Mollie war, an' the pecan-tree whar Kit war tied. Find out what's becum' on 'em, an' who's tuck 'em, an' make short work on it. Now, boys, sot right whar yer are, an' don't sling nary word to bother the Tonk."

The Tonkaway in a moment was at the tree to which Kit had been tied, and down on his hands and knees, searching every footprint, and noting the position of everything about the tree, and soon found the knife-severed cords which had bound Kit. With a grunt of satisfaction, but without a word, he proceeded to where Mary had suffered so severely. Nothing escaped the keen eye, and he was soon on the trail taken by Kit when he carried Mary; but, seeing that she had been returned, he very soon found that Bear Claw had secreted the maiden, and then afterward came with his horse and took her away.

The Tonkaway had noted the direction taken by both parties, who had the captives, and he now, with long, quick strides, returned to the anxiously-expectant Rangers, who showed the anxiety they felt at his success.

Halting opposite Big Foot, Raven spoke:

"Raven find trails—plain as Medina river—Red Trailer shoot heap—shoot Black Wolf—Black Wolf try kill Eagle Eye—Will, he ride quick—cut Eagle Eye loose—Eagle shot bad—no know nothing—Wild Will take him on mustang—go over prairie that way—where sun go sleep—Bear Claw leave warrior—no fight—want Mary for squaw—drag in woods—get horse—take Mary—ride fast—that way—where cold winds come—"

"Waal, ef I mayn't be sculped by a six-year-old squaw," exclaimed Big Foot, "ef this don't knock everything else a-kitin'! What's ter do? Boys, we has got tew split, and two to one we ain't gobbled up an' lose our ha'r. It's mighty bad luck tew devide a party, scanty as we are, but it has got ter be did, an' no lingerin'. Hobbles a few o' ther leaders o' them mustangs what we tuck; I reckon they won't stray fur; pick out a nag fer Clown an' Larry, an' some critters tew take on ther lead. Will an' Kit are in the Bandera Hills by this, and the crazy Red Trailer may strike fer Camp Verdi. That cowardly Bear Claw will go mighty fast fer ther Gordalope, afore he draws a rein. We'll all meet at ther upper ford. Tonk, Clown, Jack an' myself 'll go fer Mollie; Tom, Joe an' Larry, yer must hunt that crazy man. Don't giv' up ther trail, fer Kit are a boy what Texas can't spare."

The horses captured from the Indians were driven down the river, some of them hobbled to keep the drove from straying far, and in fifteen minutes from the time Big Foot had given his instructions—for he was the acknowledged leader in all small parties he chanced to be with—the Rangers waved *adios* to each other and were galloping, one party to the north on the trail of Bear Claw and Mary, the other to the west after Wild Will and Kit.

The trails being so recently made, and the animals of Bear Claw and Wild Will carrying double loads, they were easily followed at a fast lope by the Rangers.

CHAPTER XVI.

SAVED.

On went the galloping, tortured steed of the death-dealing Will, the latter ever and anon giving vent to his maddened thoughts by piercing, horrible yells, which, with the frequent

pricking of the cruel bowie-knife, caused the mustang to almost fly toward the Bandera Hills.

The body of Kit hung limp and seemingly lifeless over the thighs of Will, down upon each side of the animal.

Kit's long hair swept through the prairie grass and flowers, which at times were more highly colored than nature tints, by the drops of blood dripping from his wounds.

Comanche arrows were hanging from the clothing of both, showing that the arms which sent them on their mission of death were weak, made so by the unearthly apparition which had so suddenly burst upon them, and awakened all the superstition which exists to a greater or less extent among the wild and ignorant throughout the world.

No more fearful sight could have been seen than the picture presented; but, what would make tender hearts to ache, was to see the wounded scout borne in such a way and seemingly a corpse.

Like after mile they dashed on, fit emblems of madness and death.

Suddenly they entered a valley, bounded north and south by wooded hills, and along the southern range ran the Medina river.

The mustang galloped now in a weak and wavering way, and headed toward the river, without his wild rider making any movement to control or check him.

The horse was so weakened by loss of blood and over-exertion that it was plain he would never bear his mad rider again.

Every yell of Will's brought a corresponding moan from the animal, for a stab of the knife was sure to follow.

They neared the river, neither horse, madman nor death-stricken scout knowing what was ahead.

On rushed the horse through the timber, staggering and frothing blood, while the yells of Will were redoubled.

A light fringe of brush lined the bank, and the mustang made one wild labored leap over this, as if eager for death to release him from the dread slavery of his master.

It was his last bound; his hind hoofs raked through the brush which overhung the bank, and down, down all plunged into the dark waters which closed over them, leaving a bubbling whirlpool upon the surface.

Great God! are they dead?"

It was a plunge of twenty feet from the bank to the water.

Can it be that so brave a scout and Ranger as Kit, who has come out unscathed from a hundred hard fights, should come to such an end, and through the means of the father of her he loves more than life itself, and who now prays God to guard him from all harm, while she is a captive in savage hands, and depending upon him to deliver her?

Suddenly the waters were disturbed; there is life beneath those bubbles.

The snorting head of the horse breaks through the surface; the fore feet of the mustang spurns the water and he struggles toward the shore; his hoofs strike the sand; then he reaches the reed-lined bank, and jerking and half-crawling the horse draws himself, with all the strength left in his poor mangled frame, up, clear of the water, but stumbles out flat upon the reeds, bringing with him across the saddle the limp, dripping form of Kit, the silken sash about his waist having caught on the horn of the saddle.

The noble beast has, with his last strength, in his great suffering, saved a human life, for, as the mustang falls among the reeds, a torrent of blood bursts from his mouth and nostrils; its eyes glare and roll wildly, while his head sinks slowly down amid the coarse grass.

The brave steed is dead—its great heart broken by terror, pain and exhaustion; while Kit, brought back to life by the sudden bath, half-unconsciously, like a drunken man, feels about him, and tremblingly draws himself up by the horn of the saddle to a sitting position, loosens the sash, and "slips himself over on the opposite side of the dead horse, reclining against the same, his limbs amid the reeds, his head supported by his arm, which leans over the saddle.

Weak as an infant, he keeps this position, gazing in wonder and astonishment at his surroundings.

Over his head entwine the branches of the tall river-bottom trees—the hanging vines and festoons of moss almost hiding the sunlight.

At his feet rolls a river with a bank of some height just across, and his trained eyes detect the broken brush where the mustang crashed over.

Kit slowly turns his head, and casts a more wondering look at the dead horse.

A couple of Indian arrows, their barbed heads just piercing the skin of the horse's neck, are plainly to be seen, and carry his thoughts back to the Comanche camp.

He remembers being tied to the tree, the charge of Will Halliday, the flash of the knife in the hands of Black Wolf, the war-whoops of the dismayed savages as the madman shot them down.

He remembers nothing more.

Where he was, or what brought him there, was a mystery.

There was the horse, and the spot where he sprung over the bank into the river; but how came he on the horse, and what guided him to this desolate spot?

Kit was not long to remain in ignorance; there was a swaying and crushing of reeds behind him down the river, and the regular tread of a man came to his ears.

Hoping the man was a friend, Kit lay quite still, when, to his amazement not unmingled with horror, Wild Will stood before him, water running in streams from his clothing.

His enforced bath had, in a measure, cooled off his over-heated brain, and softened the wild looks of his eyes.

The paint was washed in streaks from his features, showing the skin of a livid pallor, and not improving his appearance.

There was a look of mingled surprise, sorrow and anger in his face, as he gazed upon his dead horse; and as he looked fixedly at Kit, the latter noticed that he seemed to have pity in his eyes, and to realize that his care and attention were needed.

Kit was not mistaken, for Will sprung up the bank, gathered dry twigs and leaves, and then with his steel and flint started a fire. When this was done he approached the dead horse; ran his bowie-knife through the skin down the ham; then across the upper portion along the back-bone, he tore down the hide, and cut several large steaks out, and these were soon broiling before the fire.

Although Kit had taken in no small quantity of water, at the time of his plunge, yet a raging thirst tormented him, originating from the fever occasioned by his wounds; and he with some difficulty, for he was very weak and stiff, loosened a tin cup from the saddle, and easily dipped up water from where he lay.

Taking a long drink, he afterward poured cup after cup-full upon his wounded leg and bruised head.

He dared not speak to Will for fear of his again becoming mad.

After the steaks were done, the Red Trailer appeared before Kit, and deposited three smoking-hot and savory-smelling ones upon the reeds, within easy reach; then he returned to the fire to tear and devour the remainder of the meat like a ravenous beast.

Although Kit was now convinced by his observation that the horse had saved his life, still he was forced, under the circumstances and a gnawing appetite, to partake of a portion of the animal, which he did, and heartily, too.

When the scout had satisfied his hunger he felt somewhat stronger, and after many vain attempts, he at last succeeded in getting to a standing position, and by working his joints and applying water without stint for a while, he was enabled to gain the upper bank to the fire, where to his surprise, he found that Wild Will had devoured the last morsel of horse-meat, and was in a deep sleep, which almost seemed death. That his sleep would be a long one Kit was confident; so he seated himself by the fire, and threw on more wood. Although the sun was intensely hot out on the prairie, Kit was chilled, owing to the loss of blood, slow circulation from his weakened state, and his recent bath.

Taking his silken sash from his waist he bound up his wounds, applying a poultice made from a healing herb which he found growing near.

Seated by the fire, holding his forehead with his hands, Kit leaned forward and looked into the blaze, trying to collect his thoughts and form some plan for the future.

Mary was still a prisoner; he knew she was in the Comanche camp, when her father charged through it, and he knew that Will had killed a number of Indians, which would cause them to move camp at once, for fear of attack from other parties of whites who might have heard the firing. Of the charge of his brother Rangers, just on the heels of the Red Trailer, he was of course ignorant.

Tom and Joe, the only persons near, would not have any chance to liberate Mary, as the Indians would be doubly watchful and doubtless send down some warriors to the ford, to bury their dead.

These might also come in contact with his friends, and perhaps kill or capture them. Everything had a dark and dubious look to Kit, and to cap all, he was without arms or a horse, both indispensable, if he hoped to accomplish anything.

Possibly the Indians had left their camp and he could regain his six-shooters, which he had thrown into the brush after emptying them at his pursuers.

He must at once find out where he was. He thought he was on the Medina; could he cross the river and mount the bank, he would be able to locate himself exactly.

But, what could he do without a horse or arms? It was true, Will had a pair of revolvers; but, could he get one from him without waking him?

It was worth a trial. Kit crawled up to the sleeping form of the maniac, who had saved his life from the Indians, and who was the father of his sweetheart.

It was a mean trick, Kit thought, but not so

bad as if he had left him wholly unarmed. Will would doubtless find his way to Camp Verdi, where he was well known, and get another horse.

Kit succeeded in securing the revolver without disturbing the madman, and then walked up and down beneath the trees until he somewhat wore away the stiffness of his limbs.

The necessity of immediate action, the knowledge that Mary was in savage hands, served to bring him back to himself more than anything, as his sufferings of mind counterbalanced those of his body.

His plans were quickly formed and as quickly acted upon; he proceeded to the body of the horse, loosened the lariat from its neck and started down the river.

He traversed over a mile before he found the indications or trails of which he was in search, and these were the beaten paths made by the wild mustangs when coming from the prairies to the south for water at the river.

Selecting a spot where the brush was thick upon both sides of the trail, he secured the end of the lariat to the stout limb of an oak, then running the slack over the brush, he adjusted the loop ends upon twigs on each side, leaving a large open noose just the height that a mustang would carry its head.

When all was arranged to his satisfaction Kit turned away from the river through the timber, to ascertain if there were any mustangs on the prairie.

Concealing himself he parted the bushes on the border of the timber, and gazed out on the plain, where, to his great joy, he saw not a mile away a herd of some forty of the noble animals he wanted coming prancing and running toward the very spot where he lay.

It was a beautiful sight at any time to see their graceful antics, their long tails sweeping the prairie flowers, their curly manes thrown coquettishly up and down through the air, by the tossing of their heads in playfulness.

A noble roan stallion in the lead Kit hoped would be his game; and everything was favorable to that end. Anxiously the Ranger awaited the success of his trap.

It was but a moment after the wild horses had dashed past him when a scream of fright, a kicking and scrambling among the bushes, broke on his expectant ear; then the terrified herd bounded toward the plain without a leader.

Kit sprung down the trail and found the king of the herd almost choked to earth; the lariat trap had done its work!

Binding a handkerchief about the eyes of the mustang, Kit loosened the noose or loop of the lariat, and then detached the other end from the limb of the tree. Running a loop around the under jaw of the frightened mustang, he drew out its tongue and led the animal up the trail to the open plain. Here he lost no time, but immediately sprung upon the steed's back, and leaning forward drew the blind from its eyes.

One look of terror, of mingled surprise and madness, and the noble animal sprung high in the air, then launched away over the prairie like the wind.

CHAPTER XVII.

BEAR CLAW AND HIS CAPTIVE.

BEAR CLAW mounted upon his favorite mustang bounded over the moonlit prairie toward the north, holding tightly to his breast the inanimate form of Mary, whose great beauty had inspired love and admiration to such an extent in his savage heart that he had dishonored himself rather than lose her, as he feared he would, had he joined his dismayed and disheartened warriors, who were left without a chief by the death of Black Eagle.

He was confident that the Texans would soon be masters of the camp, but was also sure in his mind that some of his braves would escape death, and rendezvous near the Enchanted Rock as agreed upon by several small parties, who had been together when starting from the distant villages near the Staked Plains, and of which his band had formed a part.

Should he appear among them he would be branded as a coward who had brought dishonor and destruction upon his own warriors, and also those of Black Wolf, by showing a weakness in not destroying the white squaw.

He knew that death awaited him should he ever again show his face among his own people; but it was too late to turn back; he would make his way to the Apaches and join that tribe with his beautiful squaw, the Rose of the Medina.

Such thoughts flitted through his savage mind. He felt he had been becoming more like a squaw than a warrior since he had first beheld the pale-faced maiden in her great beauty bound to the tree in the blaze of her father's cabin.

It was the first time in his life that he had sheathed his knife or dropped his bow, when the war-cries of his braves were sounding, and the death-yells of his tribe filled his ears.

Two days before, the rifle-shots and wild yells which he now plainly heard, would have made the hot blood leap within his veins, and the war-whoop spring to his lips. Nothing upon earth

could have kept him from joining in the battle now raging so near him but the fair face of his captive.

He pressed the Rose of the Medina closely to his panting breast, and made the long raw-hide quirt hiss and cut around the hams of his horse, although the animal was flying over the plain with the speed of the wind.

Suddenly the thought came to him that he might have disgraced himself and sacrificed his warriors for naught, for there seemed to be no life in the fair maid of the pale-faces; her form was limp, and he could not see or feel that she breathed at all!

He remembered all her sufferings; she might die—she might be dead now!

A quick pull of the reins brought his mustang upon his haunches, the loop-end of the lariat was thrust over his arm to prevent the animal from leaving, as the horse appeared much alarmed at the unusual proceedings, and at being away from his kind.

Bear Claw slid to the ground, and taking Mary from the horse, he laid her in an easy position upon the grass, using his quiver of arrows to support her head.

Detaching a bag and gourd from the cantle of his saddle, he poured water from the latter on Mary's head, and down her parched throat, while he hoped she would be revived by the lightest zephyr of a breeze that fanned her brow from the west.

As the Indian chief anxiously watched his captive for some sign of returning life, a convulsive sigh broke from her beautiful lips, and her blue eyes opened in wonder.

She gazed upon the azure heavens bedecked with stars, and the round, pale moon.

Where was she?

A shadow passed between her vision and the orb of night. The dark, hideously-painted visage of Bear Claw came before her eyes; but there was no surprise or fear in her looks.

She had arrived at that desperate state when, having experienced so many horrors, nothing appals.

There seemed to be a soft, tender look in the chief's eyes, which she had not noticed previously when face to face with him.

He pressed the gourd again to her lips, and she took a long draught of the precious liquid; it was delicious, and put new life and strength into her weakened frame.

The thought now came to her that to eat and drink would be her only salvation. She had not cared to live, but now, she remembered, Kit had told her he loved her; had kissed her beneath the shelter in the Indian camp; in fact, her last recollection was that Kit was holding her in his arms and running for the life of both of them.

After that all was a torturing dream more than reality, although she realized that her hero had been captured again.

He had risked his life for her; ought she not try and preserve hers for his sake?

Where was Kit now?

She raised herself to a sitting posture and gazed around.

Nothing but a boundless plain met her view, except a long line of timber to the south, which she knew marked the course of a river.

Was it the Medina?

The fact that she was alone on the prairie with Bear Claw gave her encouragement. She thought it would not be so without the Indians had been attacked and defeated by the Rangers; else why should the chief be away from his warriors?

When Bear Claw offered her a quantity of dried meat and parched corn he was overjoyed to see her eat with a ravenous appetite.

A resolution was now formed in her brain; she knew she had far better chance to escape, now that but one was left to watch her movements.

Bear Claw gazed with admiration and adoration at his fair captive, then addressed her in what was to him a soft, low tone:

"Bear Claw glad to see Rose eat—she been much heap sick—Rose eat—get well quick—have venison when sun comes—Bear Claw heart soft when with Rose of Medina—she fair as prairie-flower—Bear Claw no take Rose—braves burn at torture-fire—scalp Rose—Bear Claw Apache now—Comanche no more—take Rose to Apache hunting-grounds—over big river—Pecos—she be his squaw."

"The Rose, as you call me, will never be the squaw of the red-man," exclaimed Mary, in a tone not to offend. "Where is Kit, my friend—the Eagle Eye, as you call him?"

At the mention of this dreaded, hated name, the Indian's eyes snapped; and a dark scowl hovered upon his countenance as he angrily answered, in an exultant tone:

"Eagle Eye gone to his fathers—his scalp hang at Comanche belt—Comanche knife red with Eagle Eye blood—Rose never see more—Bear Claw no kill Rose people—no stop braves on war-path—Great Spirit heavy hand on Will—he much bad—wild like mustang—ride off there—Camp Verdi—know nothing—braves heap 'fraid ride in camp—think devil."

Mary, noticing intently and weighing every word spoken by Bear Claw, gazed up into his

eyes with a look so far removed from fear that it surprised and gratified him.

She had ceased eating at his last remark.

Her father, then, was still alive: would he have sense enough to follow and rescue her? Alas! she feared not; for she doubted if he knew or realized that she still lived.

But Kit, he could not be dead; she felt that he still lived; he must live for her sake; God would surely not take her last friend on earth from her.

Was the assurance that he still lived whispered to her by the gentle south-west breeze which had so recently fanned his cheek as he was borne by her maniac father further and further away from home?

"Kit the Eagle Eye scout lives!" suddenly burst from Mary's lips, in a prophetic voice.

"There is a lie in your mouth, and your cheek shall pale when his war-cry sounds in your ears."

As Mary said this her eyes turned heavenward and she muttered:

"Oh, God! grant me this assurance or let me die!"

Had a rattlesnake sprung at his heart, with its fearful rattle sounding in his ears, the Indian chief could not have bounded to his feet more quickly. He gazed around the plain on every side, as if expecting to see Kit, and to hear the threatened cry of war.

"Who has told Rose Eagle Eye lives—do pale-faces whisper over big plain?" whispered Claw, in astonished wonder.

"No!" answered Mary, reverently rising to her feet, her long curls hanging down over the shoulders, her hands and eyes raised toward the sky. "The Great Spirit has whispered that Eagle Eye lives, and He never tells a lie!"

The chief shrunk back with superstitious awe. The angelic figure before him, her extreme beauty and innocence, together with the veneration expressed upon her face, as she added another prayer of thanksgiving to God for having given her in this strange way the assurance that he she loved still lived, strangely impressed him, and as the color came once more into her cheeks, adding to her ravishing beauty, the chief smothered down his feelings of awe, and again put on the cloak of the warrior which had been cast aside through his great admiration for his captive.

"Come; Bear Claw no squaw—he no fool—Rose has eat—moon soon hide below plain—then sun come—white warriors find Bear Claw trail—want his scalp. Come, Rose is with Bear Claw—his heart is glad."

Bear Claw at this sprung into his saddle, and leaning down encircled Mary's waist with his arm, and drew her once more up before him. The quirt cut the air, and again they bounded on like the wind over the plain.

Mary knew that it would be impossible for her to escape while the Indian lived. She knew that, by some means, she must kill him! But could she accomplish his death?

She could await something to turn up in her favor; her mind was filled with plans, and her eyes were minutely inspecting every trapping and weapon of Bear Claw.

His bow and quiver were at his back, and long scalping-knife at his belt; if she could get the latter from his belt without his knowledge, was her arm strong enough to drive the knife to his heart? Nothing but a mortal wound must be given, she must make a sure thing, or all would be lost, for Bear Claw would prevent any such attempt being made again.

The sky was growing brighter in the east; it would soon be day. The line of timber to the south was no longer in view, but another exactly like it was in plain sight before them to the north.

That this timber would be the selected hiding-place of Bear Claw she was confident.

The dried meat and corn had made her feel more like herself; but the assurance that Kit was alive had done more to brace her up, and give her courage, than anything else.

The future did not look so dark now, and she was surprised at her own unconcern; it was not that she did not feel one-half so desolate and hopeless; it was a mystery born of love's young dream.

She felt sure that Kit would follow the trail; his keen eyes might even now be glancing into the hoof-prints of the mustang which was bearing her away; if not, if he was so badly wounded that he could not come to her, she would kill Bear Claw and go to him. She felt a greater confidence in herself than she had ever felt before.

A deep scowl was seated upon the brow of the chief as his piercing eyes scanned the timber ahead which marked the course of the Guadalupe. At times he would turn in his saddle and give a sweeping glance over the plain to the west, south and east, but naught was in sight to break the vast sea of grass and flowers.

The sun burst in all its Southern splendor above the timber-tops which lined each side of the beautiful Guadalupe.

To the north went the wiry mustang with its double load, until he was within three hundred yards of the dark shades of the bottom timber, when Bear Claw suddenly changed the animal's course up the stream and parallel with it.

He was too cautious to enter the woods until he was certain there were no enemies lurking in its shades.

How was he to know when he came to a safe place of entrance? This was the thought of Mary, as she noticed the change of course, but she soon saw how well an Indian could read the signs of nature.

They had galloped up the stream but a short distance, when a large herd of deer came slowly cropping the green twigs in their path from the river, where they had just taken their morning drink.

Here the chief turned his mustang and dashed into the timber, scattering the timid animals in every direction, for he knew if any human being was near, the deer would not be there.

His lariat hissed through the air, and the noose encircled the neck of a young fawn, too bewildered to take the right direction to escape.

Bear Claw lowered Mary to a mossy bank, beneath the hanging draperies of nature. His one great object now was to break his trail, for he knew that Mary must have rest before they proceeded further; besides, the open prairie which he would have to travel would be dangerous in the daytime; therefore he concluded to stop, hidden in the bottom, until night came again, before going toward the west.

He led his mustang into the shallow water, then up the stream until a dense mass of wild-rye was reached, and in this his horse was securely hidden, and also provided with food in the nutritious grain.

Retracing his way through the oaks, being careful not to leave any signs of his own steps, he secured the end of an extra lariat to that which was fastened to the trembling fawn, and then led the latter down the stream, coiling the loose rope in his left hand at the same time.

Once more the lariat whirled a moment over the chief's head and was sent with velocity across the river—the noose falling over a snag on the opposite shore.

The rope was drawn tight, the fawn led into the water, the slack of the rope taken up and secured to the neck of the animal.

Bear Claw returned to the side of his captive, who had watched his every movement with great interest.

"Come!" exclaimed Bear Claw; "the Rose of Medina shall have rest—she must eat—she must sleep—come!" and taking Mary by the arm he walked up the river amid the trees, watching intently everything in his front.

They had not far to walk—for a grunt of satisfaction burst from the chief's lips as they reached a point where a huge tree, having been washed about the roots by the strong current of the river, leaned over, its branches mingling and entwining with those of the trees upon the opposite bank.

The tree leaned just enough to make it easy to climb, but the passage through the branches, fifty feet above the raging torrent, was more difficult.

The chief was forced to carry Mary in his arms most of the way; but both landed safely on the other bank, and then walked down the river.

Bear Claw had, it was evident to Mary, been there before, for in a very short time she found herself in a small clear spot, surrounded by a dense thicket, with but one possible entrance.

Here the chief left her for a moment, and returned with the fawn dripping wet.

She understood it all; he had been to the snag over which he had thrown the lariat, and dragged the animal through the water, not daring to kill it on the other side, as it would leave too plain a "sign" of their presence near.

Mary gazed pitifully at the beautifully-spotted animal, whose innocent pleading eyes were turned to hers, as if for mercy.

She compared her situation to that of the fawn, and covered her face with her hands, as the chief with his long scalping-knife prepared to butcher the little animal, as he had many a human being of her own color.

But her thoughts soon wandered, thinking of her lover, and speculating as to what he was doing, until Bear Claw placed before her some hot broiled portions of the fawn, together with parched corn and a gourd of water.

The fawn was out of all sufferings in this world, and hence Mary's appetite would not permit her to indulge in sentiment. Her resolution to do all she could to regain strength was carried out by her partaking of a hearty meal.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FIGHT ON THE PRAIRIE.

BIG FOOT, Jack, Clown and the Tonkaway galloped at as fast a speed as was possible, and at the same time keep the trail of Bear Claw.

Raven in the lead, leaning over his mustang's shoulder with his keen eyes upon the hoof-prints of the Comanche chief's horse, occupied the responsible position of first trailer.

The sun rose into the heavens and the spot was inspected where Mary had been resuscitated and fed by her captor, and the bottom-timber of the Guadalupe river was in plain view, when Raven, who was intent on observing the trail, was brought to a sudden halt by a shrill yell from Big Foot, which caused the Rangers to

bring their horses upon their haunches with astonishment.

"By ther jumping Ge-hoss-i-fat! an' all Geru-ci-lem! are ye all blind?" exclaimed the giant scout, his voice expressing the utmost anger and disgust. "Thar's more reds 'n w'u'd gobble up Burleson's company, let alone sich a slim squad as this here. I'd 'a' reckoned on gittin' Mollie outen this scrape without much more blood-spillin', but we're dished fur the dangeest slim-mest show yit, fur thar nags are fresh, an' ther cusses are gittin' in atween us an' timber ahead. Clown, them's yer old friends, ther 'Paches, shure as yer born."

Each of the Rangers at the first sight of their numerous foes, and realizing at a glance the advantage the Indians held over them, felt the very marrow in their bones chill. One-half of a large war-party were in a dead run between the Rangers and the timber, and curving in a long line toward the west, while the remainder were on a run like mad to the east to cut them off from retreating in that direction.

Not a movement was made by Big Foot's party to advance or retreat; they had depended on the Tonkaway to look out ahead for danger—in fact expected none, and being extremely worn for want of rest, had ridden, as is often the case on the plains, partly asleep on their horses; but they were wide awake now, and their dangerous position made them think rapidly.

"Dang the red devils, thar a-goin' to circle on us, an' we've got ter do sum purty plum shootin' ter show 'em what we're made of; but I reckon by the looks of things, our sculps ar' spoke fur, least-a-ways I feel a crawlin' at the ruts o' my h'ar. What yer think on ther way things have turned out, boys?"

Before Big Foot had ceased speaking the little band of Rangers were cut off from retreat and hemmed in on every side.

"I reckon we've got into the wrong coach, an' on ther wrong line, too," answered Jack Hodge, "but we might as well sling our fare at 'em, in hard slugs, an' let 'em know we ain't ready fur ther through trip quite yit. I hold two six-spots an' an ace an' bet"—slapping his hand on revolver and rifle—"I can fill a full hand outen ther draw."

"Pards!" exclaimed Clown, "hold yer fire till ther varmints cum in clost; they don't know the distance these Sharp's rifles can sling a ball, an' we'll git half-a-dozen shots afore they can draw out o' range."

"Strike dirt, boys!" shouted Big Foot, in a determined voice. "Keep yer'sel's ahind yer nags, and fotch the extry animiles outside the hull; that'll give us a show fur chances. Watch an' wait till yer see's thar eyes snap. Look sharp, Tonk! Ther cusses hates a red what goes with white folks."

"Raven no care for Apache dogs," returned the Tonkaway; "wait till come near—shoot fast—kill heap braves—make Apache mad—then jump on mustang—ride fast to river—much heap trees—good for fight—when warriors few."

"Yer he'd's levil, Tonk," cried Big Foot; "that's our game, boys; give 'em a taste o' our Sharps, then, when they ar' ruther mixed like, we'll jump ther game an' make our sixes cut a way fur us; but, wait fur ther word."

The Rangers were now entirely surrounded by one whirling mass of circling Indians—feather-bedizened, war-painted Apaches, who were yelling like fiends.

Each Ranger was now standing behind his mustang with his deadly long-range rifle resting across the saddle.

As the Indians neared the seemingly doomed Rangers, and the black glittering eyes of the former flashed hatred at their white foes, they drew bows from sheaths, and arrows hung between the fingers of their ready hands, to be sent with lightning velocity into the little circle which formed the hub of the wheel of war.

"Ther varmints ar' cummin' too clost, boys," exclaimed Big Foot, suddenly, "git ready with yer shooters; hav' yer extra cartridge ready, an' jist do sum tall lead-slinging. Now! Give it to 'em. Fire!"

The four rifles blended in one loud report just as the Apache war-cry burst on the air, with blood-curdling power, from a hundred throats, and a hundred pointed glittering steel-headed arrows hissed and cut the air, from all around the circle.

An instant after another and another loud report burst from the rifles of the Rangers, until the great dexterity of the whites in reloading made it seem that a score were within that little clump of horses.

At every volley braves fell upon all sides, among the yelling, whirling horde, and often as a warrior halted his mustang an instant to drag a wounded brother brave back, beyond the fire of the whites, he toppled headlong from his horse, dead by the side of him he strove to save.

At the first volley the Indians began to draw away and the circle commenced to enlarge in place of contracting; the clouds of arrows which flew through the air fell short, or those that reached the whites had lost their force and did no damage.

Fast flashed the Sharp's rifles; larger and

larger grew the circle of painted warriors and wild steeds withdrawing further and further away from the Rangers; still the deadly rifles sent death in among them.

They were not only astonished at the long distance the rifles sent their leaden death-warrants, but at the accuracy of the whites' shooting, whom they had thought to capture without any trouble.

"H'ist yersel's, boys!" yelled Big Foot; "sling yer Sharps an' git-up-an'-git lively, arter me; we'll make a run for timber an' bu'st in this Injun ring. Don't none on yer wilt in yer boots, an' don't mind gittin' yer spurs bloody. Cum on. E—e—e ho!! Hurrah! fur General Jackson, Davy Crockett and ther Lone Star State?"

Away went the Rangers toward that portion of the Indian circle nearest the timber; instantly those warriors near the point for which the whites were making charged to meet and intercept them, until full a score were directly in the path of the four brave men who came on abreast at dare-devil speed, their bridle-reins between their teeth, and a Colt's revolver in each hand.

It was a perfect hurtling of lead into the midst of the Indians before they could with any regularity prepare to meet the charge of the desperate men who held their lives in their hands.

The quick-playing fingers made the six-shooters to rattle, and it was more than the Apaches could stand; they fell so thick and fast that the dead were in the way of the living, who could not use their weapons to advantage. The Rangers dashed through and over them, crushing the skulls and limbs of the fallen with the hoofs of their mustangs.

Turning in their saddles the scouts fired what few shots they had left from their revolvers, and once more brought their rifles into play, loading and firing on the run.

Not an Indian was left between them and the river-bottom, which was but a short distance ahead, and they were sure of making a cover where they could defend themselves to better advantage.

Never before was a war-party of Apaches so filled with astonishment and surprise at the turn affairs had taken; they looked in maddened anger upon the heaps of slain as they rode past them, in the chase after the four men who had so successfully evaded them.

Fierce war-cries rent the air, and frequent death-yells rung over the prairies, while the monotonous death-songs of the mortally wounded caused the survivors to gnash their teeth with fury, and lash their mustangs on the path for revenge.

But this eagerness was cooled down, as the Rangers safely galloped under the branches of the oaks, sprung from their mustangs, and, with a rapidity mysterious to the wondering Indians, sent volley after volley into their ranks until they were forced to fall back out of range.

Just at this moment a horse came bounding down the river, on the border of the timber, and upon the back of the animal sat a beautiful white girl, her long curls flying behind in the wind, her cheeks flushed, and she was pulling with all her strength upon the rein, striving in vain to turn the stubborn steed into the bottom timber, and toward the whites.

She was some distance from the latter, but they, observing the Indians madly galloping up the stream, turned to see what was the cause, and discovered Mary, for whom they had come so near sacrificing their lives.

They sprung out from the woods, waving their hats and yelling, to attract her attention; but from the manner she rode they saw she had no control over the mustang, which they knew must be the same animal which belonged to the chief, Bear Claw.

It was plain to see that they could be of no service to her, and that she would again be a captive to the reds.

"I tell yer, boys," said Big Foot, sadly, "this are cussed mean. I'll sling it ag'in that I never seen things look so danged bamfoosedly mixed afore. Jist tew think, after so much skarmishin' an' real ole out-an'-out tough fi'tin', that we've got tew stand here an' gaze at that gal o' Will's glide rite outen ther fryin'-pan inter ther blue blaze! She'd a heap better stayed eacy with B'ar Claw an' we'd 'a' fotchd her out hunk, sure an' sarton, soon r or later, but now she are clear dead sure fur a right smart long trail with a cussed site of misery on ther end on't, or a short one ter kingdom cum. Boys, I pass; I hain't got no hand, and yer can slip me ther next deal."

CHAPTER XIX.

A WOMAN'S FLUCK.

WE must now return to Mary Halliday, and explain how she came to escape from the Comanche chief.

It was only a little while after her savage captor had placed before her the broiled fawn and parched corn of which she had made a hearty meal, that Bear Claw approached her, holding in his hands several buckskin strings, saying to her:

"Bear Claw sleep—Rose sleep—Rose no run away—tie hands, tie feet;" and suiting the ac-

tions to the words he bound Mary, hand and foot, and, returning to the opposite side of the opening, he lay down upon the grass, and soon his deep breathing told Mary that her enemy was asleep.

Now, thought she, was the time for action; now or never must she make an attempt to escape the dread fate which was in store for her should she be taken to the far-away Apache Land.

She was bound with buckskin which was quite dry; by wetting it it would stretch!

She managed, after considerable trouble and pain, to work her body near where the water gourd lay, and also to remove the grass stopper; then, holding her wrists under the mouth, she allowed the water, by tipping the gourd, to gradually moisten the thongs until they became saturated; then, by jerking, twisting and pulling, her bonds became loose enough to allow of her drawing her hands through easily.

When her hands were free the unloosening of her ankles was readily accomplished, and she was her own mistress; but, there lay the hideous, dreaded savage, who would awaken at the slightest rustle of a branch or break of a twig.

Must she kill him as he slept?

She felt that she could not hope to gain her way through the bushes up the river without awakening the chief, and her chances after a recapture would be greatly lessened by this attempt to escape.

Mary stood upright and gazed upon the sleeping form of the demon before her—nerving herself for the—murder?

No! It was no murder, for, although formed in human shape, he was but a fiend. His knife lay beside the remains of the poor innocent fawn, red with its blood, as it had been before with her own dear mother's.

He was the murderer of those most dear to her upon earth, and she hesitated no longer, but seized the keen-edged scalping-blade.

Stealing as silently as a panther toward the sleeping savage, holding in her breath, her heart in her throat, Mary finally stood over the recumbent form of the chief.

She dare not delay for fear those black, piercing eyes would open, and the glittering steel be turned to her own breast.

Her trembling arm became firm, her teeth clenched, and with all the strength she could control, Mary drove the knife to the hilt into the breast of Bear Claw, and the next instant sprung toward the path which led from the little opening.

Here, before the bushes would break the view, she turned and cast a hurried glance back; she could not help it—a dreadful fascination drew her back—her feet seemed frozen to the earth.

Bear Claw had, although mortally wounded, with a superhuman effort sprung to his feet, his eyes glared with intense hatred and awful agony at the terrified girl.

He made one step toward Mary, which froze the marrow in her bones, and congealed the blood in her veins with horror. His hand went trembling to the handle of the knife which pierced him, and, unable to bear the torture, he drew it forth, to be followed by a hot stream of blood.

The eyes of Bear Claw rolled in agony; the death-yell rung from his lips; blood forced itself from mouth and nostrils, and with a gurgling, gasping shriek of anguish he fell prone upon the gore-besprinkled grass, a corpse.

Mary grasped the bushes as she swayed back and forth, faint and sick at the dreadful sight; but, the thought of his savage nature and brutal acts came to drive away those of regret and repentance at having taken human life in so murderous a manner.

Mary fell upon her knees and offered a prayer of thankfulness to God for delivering her from the hideous monster who now lay but a lump of lifeless clay before her.

Her prayer of thanks over, she arose and gazed about the dusky shadows of the bottom timber, and realized her loneliness.

What should she do? Where should she go?

A volley of rifle-shots, followed by the terrible Apache war-cry, rung through the before silent woods to answer her. The sounds of conflict came from over the river.

That her friends were on her trail she could not doubt, but what Indians were these to oppose them? This was a mystery she must clear up immediately, and join those who were risking their lives to rescue her.

Mary bounded, as graceful as the poor fawn had before in crossing the trail of Bear Claw, up the river, until she came to the high-hanging natural bridge.

Up she sprung in the branches—over, and under, and through, where at another time she would not have dared to venture. High up, over the seething waters, from limb to limb, as nimble as a squirrel, went the eager girl, the rifle-shots urging her to greater exertion, until at last she stood upon the mosses at the foot of the leaning pecan; but she did not linger; the horse of the chief must once more bear her over the prairies; this time alone.

She glided through the tall wild rye and stood before the snorting mustang. The saddle had not been removed, and Mary loosened the lariat

from the limb of the oak and led the horse clear of the tall rye.

She then gathered the rope, hand over hand up to the head of the prancing horse, patted gently his nose and speaking in a friendly, winning way; but the sounds of war were near, and the actions of the animal showed that he was eager for the fray.

Leading the impatient steed alongside a fallen tree-trunk, Mary sprung into the saddle. No sooner had she touched the horse's back, when away went the wild steed toward the scene of conflict through the woods.

When the horse and fair rider dashed through the parting boughs, and were on the open prairie, Mary saw quickly her great mistake; but too late, for the war-horse so used to bearing his master into battle refused to be guided or checked in speed by the weakened girl, and poor Mary, having just escaped from a horrible fate, found herself again a captive, surrounded by a crowd of fierce-scowling war-painted Apaches whom recent defeat by the Rangers had made furious.

Loud, exultant cries filled the air as they bound Mary fast to the horse which she rode, and then galloped with her to the dead-besprinkled battle-field.

CHAPTER XX.

LARRY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

It was some two hours before noon of the same day they started from the camp of the defeated Comanches, that the small band of Reckless Joe galloped up the bank of the Medina river at the very point where the horse of the Red Trailer had made the leap over with his mad master and Kit's senseless form on his back.

They had been able to follow the trail at a fast lope, as Will's horse was not fresh and carried a double load.

As the Texans and Larry brought their mustangs to a halt on the brink of the bank, and gazed down, a score of buzzards idly flapped their wings, and arose from about the dead horse, but were too anxious for the expectant feast to fly away.

A few sneaking coyotes slunk under the dark recesses amid the river reeds with blood-dripping jaws.

"By all the 'Gods of War'!" burst from the lips of Reckless Joe, mingled with deep grief, and astonishment; "here ends the trail and also the lives of Wild Will and Kit. There lays sign that talks plain."

"Hold on, Joe," interrupted Tom: "I'll own things look like as if they'd thro'd thar cards an' passed in thar checks, but I've alwis made it a p'int ter not jump at anything till I took a squar' look, an' knew whar I ware, an' whar I was cummin' out. Let's drape outen our saddles, take a sot down an' gaze at things about long enuf ter shuffle an' sling a new lay-out. I'm as played out as a mustang arter a long stampede. Larry, slip frum yer nag an' take a rest; yer lookin' blue about ther gills."

"Blue, is it, Mither Tom?" returned Larry. "Sure it's brown I ought to be, after the hot ride I'm afther havin', wid divil a tree to kape the hot sun frum me, or a bite to ate, an' sorra a noggin o' potheen. Bedad! but it's no 'asy job to git down frum the same. 'Pon my soul it's provokin' it is to be perishun wid thirst, an' wather be the barrals rollin' along jest out o' r'ach. Arrah! but I'll have sum if I has to swim afther it."

While Larry was trying to find some safe approach to the water below, Joe and Tom held the ends of their lariats, allowing their mustangs to range and crop the grass, and at times gazing wistfully down at the cool water.

The boys seated themselves on the bank and began to scan everything upon the opposite shore, trying to form conclusions in their minds as to the fate of Kit and the madman.

The two Rangers spent some time investigating as far as they could by eyesight, and reasoning within their minds upon the mystery which lay before them, not taking any notice of Larry, who was blundering about the bushes up the stream, muttering to himself.

"One thing is plain to me, Tom," said Joe, breaking the silence; "Kit was wounded bad, and without his senses when he went over this bank, for he never would have stayed on the horse with Will had he known what he was about. The mustang has not let up from a fast lope since they left the Indian camp, the trail shows that; and also that Kit has lost a large quantity of blood. It's a sure thing that both Kit and Will went over here on that horse, and just as plain that the mustang crawled out without them, for the animal was dying, or nearly so, when he made that leap; and it is also certain that he unseated both of them—must have, for it's a deep hole and the fall would take them under water."

"Wal, Joe," returned Tom, "I gives in that Kit ware not 'zactly in ther fix tew spread himself on ther swim, much; fact are, I reckon he's gone under, fur sure, but as tew Will's havin' slumped in an' skooted on ther long dark trail, I'm danged ef I thinks ther cuss ware made tew be killed anyways, or he'd 'a' bin good fur a six-root laad warrant back yonder among ther reds."

As it ware, you can follow his trail anywhere; it's red with the blood—"

At this moment the two Rangers were brought to their feet by a yell of terror from Larry, and looking up the river from whence the cry emanated, they saw an immense panther just leaping from the branches of a tree to the bank below, and at the same time another yell of desperation and despair, followed by a crashing of brush, and then a loud splashing plunge in the river, came to their ears.

The sharp reports of the rifles of Tom and Joe echoed through the timber, and the panther rolled over and over in the agonies of death toward the verge of the steep bank.

The two Rangers gazed anxiously down into the water, just as the head of Larry broke through the surface. He gave one wild, horrified look backward as he struck out for the opposite bank, but that look was enough; it was given just as the panther, in the last gasps and struggles of death, toppled over the bank and went rolling down into the water, not three feet from the head of the Irishman.

With a yell which sent the buzzards flapping away in every direction, and rendered the mustangs almost unmanageable, and with eyes bulging from his head in terror, Larry disappeared again below the surface, to avoid the clutches of the dreaded beast, which he thought was taking a second leap after him, for in his great fear, and being under the water at the time Tom and Joe had fired, he did not know the brute was dead.

Joe and Tom, although surrounded by uncertainty and great fears for the safety of a dear friend, could not restrain their mirth, but rolled on the sward, convulsed with laughter at the ludicrous incident which had broken up their conversation.

As many events, however insignificant they may appear at the time, go to make up important links in the chain of our lives, so this accident which happened to Larry proved to be the means of unvailing a portion of the mystery which hung around the dead mustang and absent riders.

Larry soon appeared above the water again, abreast of the boys. He had swum so long under water that his face looked more like a corpse's than that of a living man; but when he saw the Rangers laughing, and the panther floating on the surface, dead, he made for the opposite shore, breathing heavily with exertion and fright, and landing, seated himself among the reeds near the dead horse of Wild Will.

The Irishman was now at his wits' end to turn things in his own favor, for he feared ridicule more than he did the war-cries of Comanches.

As soon as he could regain his breath he yelled triumphantly to the Rangers:

"Phat do yees think o' that, b'ys? Did yees aver see anything n'ater than that same? Sure I bate the divil divin': an' pon me soul, I'm thinkin' he's de'd wid grafe at bain' overdun be an Irishman, or maybe he broke his neck in the fall—I don't know which, an' divil bit care I."

"What yer bin doin' with that panther Larry?" shouted Tom. "What's the trouble with you two?"

"Sure we ware afther havin' a bit ev a dispute betune us, Mither Tom, before we made an' agrament. I suppose the hairy divil thought he'd be afther b'atin' me at a dive. Begorra! 'tware betther fur him we never mit."

"What did yer bawl so for, Larry?" asked Tom; "we thought it ware yer death-yell."

"Faith that was the signal we agrade upon betune us, whin the time came to make the lape;" and then to avoid further questions from the boys, who were in vain striving to keep sober countenances, he strode past the dead horse and disappeared in the brush to reconnoiter on his own hook. In a moment after he stood before the smoldering fire, left burning a short time before by Kit.

Larry gazed in astonishment at the fire, and then his eyes wandered around among the trees until they fell upon the still sleeping form of the Red Trailer, who had remained undisturbed by the confusion and rifle-shots, as he was sleeping for the first time since the massacre of his family.

Larry was for a moment frozen to the spot; his eyes again stared in terror at the hideously-painted features, down which ran streaks of a livid, ghastly hue, showing in strong contrast where the water had washed away the paint.

The almost imperceptible breathing of the poor man was unnoticed by Larry, who supposed he was gazing at a corpse.

The dark, somber shadows of the bottom timber, the dull flapping of the wings of the buzzards, the occasional sneaking rush of a coyote through the brush, and the presence of death in so horrid a form, together with his recent fright, so worked upon the superstitious nature of Larry that he was, for a time, paralyzed with a deadly, overpowering fear, which shortly gave way enough for him to realize his position, and to return to him the use of his limbs, which he quickly availed himself of.

With a yell which threw all his former vocal accomplishments into the shade he bounded back down the bank. The yell awoke the madman, who clutched a heavy piece of wood and

hurled it among the swaying branches which marked the course taken by Larry.

The crashing of the stick at the heels of the Irishman, who thought the horrible corpse was in pursuit of him, made his hair to stand on end, congealed the blood in his veins, and his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, refusing to do its usual duty, but this took nothing from his speed, and such wild leaps were never seen before by Joe and Tom, whose attention had been attracted by Larry's yell, as he sprung for the river.

In one desperate bound he cleared the dead horse, and the next took him far out into the water, and once more poor Larry disappeared beneath the waters of the Medina.

"What in thunderation is up now?" exclaimed Tom, aroused by the Irishman's yell. "I reckon Larry's made a match with another panther on a flyin' race, an' he's jist knocked ther spots outen the animile at that. Joe, I'll bet twenty saddle-nags that Larry can out-jump, leap, dive an' yell any human white, red, yaller or black, this side ther Rockies. He's a reg'lar cuss, he are, an' I freeze ter him from this day out as a pard. Here he cums. Sling yer lariat down an' we'll haul him up outen ther drink. Reckon he ain't so almighty dry an' tharsty as he ware."

The Irishman's head came up at the base of the bank, as Tom addressed the last remark to Joe.

Larry, his head turned back to the opposite shore, clutched wildly at the soft clay, trying in vain to climb up the slimy, perpendicular bank.

Seeing no signs of the horrible corpse which he had thought in close pursuit of him, he cast a wistful, pleading look up to his comrades for help, just as the lariat was lowered for him to grasp.

In a moment after Larry was drawn up and seated on the grass, between Tom and Joe, whose great curiosity to know what had alarmed the Irishman—suspecting it was something connected with the object of their search—kept them from laughing at the comical appearance and actions of their pard.

Gazing at the other side of the river in horrible anticipation, panting with weakness, the Irishman crossed himself, and then in a hurried manner addressed his comrades:

"God save us all, for it's the divil himself I'm afther sain', barrin' the tail, an' I'm not shure but it was that same what was whiskin' about the bushes afther me. Heaven an' the blessed Saint Patrick stand betune us an' all harum, an' defend us, fur it's not far frum Purgatory we is. Sure I'll bliss the hour we l'ave this hole, an' me curse on all what's in it; a mon can't say what minute he's not in mortal danger o' death. Musha! which way is ould Ireland frum this? Begorra, if I c'u'd only hav' a kiss o' the Emerald Isle, I'd lay down on the daisies an' die wid cumfort an' aise."

"Larry," said Tom, "calm yerself; nothin' ain't a-goin' ter hurt yer when yer with us. If we hadn't bored a hole through ther panther, he'd 'a' beat yer on ther leap an' dive, bet yer life! Now, jist sling it in plain English: what in thunder has yer seen in ther brush yonder; what made yer h'ist yerself so speedy? I knows ye're no coward, fur yer jist waded inter ther reds down below hansum, arter yer got yer han' inter ther biz."

Larry scratched his head, withdrew his gaze from the dead horse, and looked at his companions; suddenly his face brightened as he answered:

"Be the powers o' pewther, I mind the time whin yees ware all mighty near scared to dith, be the same what I seen; but the divil was alive, an' ridin' a horse. Do yees forgit the time beyant be the crassin', an' Mither Big Huff an' ther other b'ys ware wid us, an' that wild divil wid his face painted cum ridin' betune us, wid never a look at ather? Do yees mind whin he went afther the Injuns alone, be himself? Be jabers! but he's the same we're afther what was ridin' the dead horse below there a bit, an' 'pon me soul he's dead himself enthirely an' layin' in the bush."

Joe and Tom looked at each other significantly, as the former asked, earnestly:

"Larry, are you sure Wild Will—for I suppose you mean him—is dead, and if so, why did you run from him?"

"Sure that's the mon, or divil, or whatever he is," answered Larry, quickly. "Wild Will; troth an' it's a fair name for the likes of him, but I know a better—*Bludy Will*, for it's the same that he l'aves behind him, but he'll not make it more. Begorra! it's the wolves what's givin' him a dacint wake, an' the dirty buzzards ar' moanin' wid joy over him."

"But what did you run for, Larry?" again inquired Joe; "he couldn't hurt you if he was dead."

"'Pon me soul," answered Larry, in a cautious whisper, gazing suspiciously over the stream, "I'd not stop near him fur the world, an' I'll niver forgit the sight ef him till me dyin' day, which, God help me, I'm thinkin' 's not far off. Sure, don't yees know that his soul is a-hoverin' over him, he havin' died widout praste or prayer, an' his spirit, knowin' the bad place it has ter go, is now whiskin' round in the

woods, for the divil, his mather, I'm supposin', wouldn't be expicted to be handy at all times, in sich a wild cuss ev a counthry, to claim his own."

Tom here sprung to his feet, exclaiming, impatiently: "Boys, this won't do. Stop here; mind my nag; I'll soon settle this thing. If our pard an' Will are dead, we're needed ter help ther livin'; so here goes fer an investigate, as ther Congressers say."

Tom drew his revolvers, passed them to Joe, retaining his bowie-knife for defense, and was lowered by the lariat to the river.

In a short space of time he gained the opposite shore, and commenced an examination of all signs about the horse, then made his way through the bushes up the higher bank.

The partly-consumed fire was there; the crumpled grass where Wild Will had lain, but no human was in view.

Tom's keen eyes swept the ground in all directions until he read the signs and trails, more plain to him than printed books. He lost no time, but hastened to join Joe and Larry, taking a gourd from Will's saddle, and filling it at the river for Joe.

As he stood once more on the bank and gave his pard the much needed drink, he said, hastily:

"Boys, our game's up here; Will ain't 'round or Kit either an' neither one's dead. Kit has slapped down the river, and Will have skedaddled sumwhar up creek, I don't care a cuss whar; he has give us a tuff run fur nothin', an' ther sooner we git-up-an'-git ter help our pards on ther Guadalupe ther better. Kit will fetch up hunk, bet a slug!"

Joe, Tom and Larry—the latter casting anxious looks behind—were soon galloping down the river, where they found a trail which led to a point where they could water their horses.

"Sure an' ye say the corpus was not afther bairn' there at all?" asked Larry of Tom. "Troth an' that proves what I was afther sayin' to yees. Bedad! but the ould one wid hoofs, horns an' tail has him be this, takin' him to his infarnal home, an' I'd not be sarprised but he'd frighten the divils thimselves whin he goes ravin' an' ragin' into purgathory."

"Don't yer be too sure of that, Larry," answered Tom; "you'll see the cuss afore another noon, I reckon, jist on ther rampage as usual, an' maybe b'ilin' over wuss, fer ther Red Trailer hain't dead yet; but the word's travel now; don't spare yer spurs, fur they may want us on t'other trail."

After clearing the hills they struck toward the Guadalupe river, not thinking it necessary to return to the battle-field of the previous night, as they could by following a course northeast come out somewhere near where Big Foot's party would strike the river, as the trail of Bear Claw ran due north from the Comanche camp.

Tom felt that Kit would make for the place where he knew Mary to be last, and once there, with his knowledge of trailing, he would soon find out the direction taken by the party in pursuit; so he had no fears for Kit, allowing that the latter had recovered from his wounds and rough treatment.

This he communicated to Joe, as they rode at as fast a lope as the condition of their mustangs would permit, toward the point where they would find they were sadly needed, and also that dangers and difficulties were thickening.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RED TRAILER TO THE RESCUE.

THE scene upon the prairie after the capture of Mary, as it presented itself to Big Foot and his pards, was one of animation.

The Apache warriors galloped hither and thither in seemingly wild confusion, but very soon the dead and wounded were bound upon the horses which had not strayed far from the battle-field.

These, with Mary secured upon the horse of Bear Claw, escorted by some forty warriors, struck up the river, while the remainder of the war-party, a score of those most noted for brave deeds, were picked out by their chief and left behind.

No sooner were the main party well started than those who were left behind sprung from their mustangs and seated themselves upon the prairie grass.

Bags of dried beef were taken from their saddles and they coolly eyed the Rangers, while they broke their fast and allowed their animals to graze the length of their lariats.

It was very evident to Big Foot and his comrades that these warriors remained for their especial benefit, and that without doubt they would be attacked the coming night, when their long-range guns could not be brought into use, except at close quarters.

The Indians, outnumbering them as they did, would stand a good chance, even without using their usual cunning and stratagem, to kill or capture them all.

Big Foot had been sitting sullenly at the foot of a post-oak devouring long strings of barbecued-beef, and the other Rangers were also engaged in like occupations, for they knew the necessity of husbanding their strength, in order

to be able to cope with their dangerous foes, who were so calmly watching them and waiting for darkness.

They could easily evade the Indians by crossing the river as soon as it became dark, but they knew their friends, who had gone on the trail of Wild Will and Kit, were liable to return, and they were not the kind of men who would leave a way open for the capture of their comrades; and another thing—if the boys did rejoice them they would stand a chance to cut this party of Apaches off from those who had Mary, and thus make it easier to regain the lost girl.

As Big Foot swallowed the last bit of food which he could find in his saddle-pockets he produced his pipe, and between the whiffs threw out his opinions and advice in regard to their present surroundings and future movements.

"Boys, this are the wust kind of a fix tew be cotched in. The red varmints has split an' skerpumped with Mollie, all we care a dang fur; but takin' keer ter leave behind enuf o' ther same scum ter keep us frum follerin'. I reckon on Joe, Tom an' Larry cummin' in this-a-ways, an' maybe Kit with 'em; then we can jist h'ist this party outen their mogasons, an' stand a show to break up ther big funeral what's on thar hands that's scooted ahead with Mollie. No use talkin', arter all this fuss, that air gall has got ter prom'nade ther Medina banks ag'in, free an' light an' airy, jist whar she wants ter glide; or this ould sculp hangs on a Apache lance. When I've got this fur on a thing I ain't a-goin' ter wilt until I've done ther biz what I started in fer if ther hull danged Comanch', Apach' an' Kiowa tribes stan' cross my trail."

"Big Foot chief talk straight!" exclaimed the Tonkaway. "Small war-party make big fight—all braves—Raven make Apache fool when night comes—Raven no speak much—think heap!"

"That's jist whar I'm drivin'," returned Jack, in answer to Big Foot, at the same time scratching his head thoughtfully. "Tonk, I'm with yer, old boy, every time. I'm a danged long ways frum bein' weakened by what scrimmages we has had on ther trip, so fur, an' I calculate tew handle ther ribbons fur Sappington ag'in, an' jist make a coach hum over ther Austin road. I'm in tew ther death an' 'll shoot till ther last kick, an' skip lively on my last trip in full harness with ther bit atween my teeth."

"Waal, pards," put in Clown, but not in a boasting way, "as long as I played a lone hand ag'in fifteen of ther same tribe up on ther Pecos, I ain't a-goin' ter stand back when I've got such backers as you are to stand by me."

"I goes my last slug on yer all!" announced Big Foot, proudly; "an' when ther next rub comes yer won't see me sit an' gaze at yer. But, this don't pay; git yer traps together an' be ready to slope. Lucky our nags are outen ther sight o' ther reds. We can jist leave our hats an' huntin'-shirts on ther bushes kinder nat'ral like an' scoot fur ther horses. We can cross ther river an' glide up-stream on t'other side, whar we'll find some posish as 'll give us a show over ther cussed hair-snatchers."

At this moment one of the mustangs in the Apache camp became entangled in the lariat of another animal, and the two, prancing and kicking about, drew the attention of the Indians from the Rangers.

"Now's yer time, boys!" exclaimed Big Foot, quickly, as he tore his buck-skin outer garment off, and ran a piece of wood across the shoulders, each end entering the sleeves to the elbows, then with a longer limb inside the folds, and the sombrero upon the top, he leaned the same against the tree where had been standing. Each of the party except the Tonkaway, who had no clothing to spare, rigged a dummy upon brush or limb, in as natural a position as possible, and all crawled away down to their mustangs, which they led to the bank of the river.

Here all mounted, and, fording, were soon on the opposite shore, and spurring up the stream, perfectly sheltered from the view of the Apache braves.

It took but a short time for our friends to reach the little *motte* of bushes where Bear Claw had met his death by the hand of Mary Halliday, and the presence of buzzards overhead perched upon the trees drew the attention of the party immediately.

The trail which led into the *motte* was discovered and all rode in, halting on the verge of the opening, inside of which lay the corpse of the Comanche chief.

The Rangers looked significantly at each other as the body was brought into view after passing the fringe of brush.

Raven sprung from his horse and rolled the Indian over, showing his features with a scowl of deadly hate still imprinted upon them; the ghastly wound in the breast, and the scalping-knife still clasped with the gripe of death in his hand.

"That jist knocks anything I ever seen," said Big Foot, in surprise; "that are ther fust red in this section what ever knifed hisself. I wish it war more fash'nerable among 'em."

The Tonkaway now held up his hand commanding attention.

"Bear Claw no kill Bear Claw—too much devil—Mary—Rose of Medina—kill when sleep

—Comanche chief jump up—give death-yell—draw out knife—then die—Mary run—get horse—ride for friends on prairie—Apache get her.”

“Boys!” exclaimed Big Foot, vehemently, “if thar’s a man here now what won’t risk his last ha’r a-tryin’ ter git that gal frum ther Injuns he ought ter be forced ter wear calico ther rest of his life. I tell yer she’s wuth fi’tin’ fur; she’s ther whitest, purtyest gal in Western Texas, an’ shall be queen o’ ther Medina in futur’.”

“She are all o’ that,” returned Jack, “an’ if we ever git outen this danged scrape w’arin’ our usual ha’r she can ride free on any line I snap a whip fur, bet yer last lingering bit!”

“Boys,” said Clown, humorously, “we’ll have sum fun with that red. We can use him to advantage now, better’n when we war prancin’ about full o’ fight; we’ll fasten a lariat to him an’ draw ther cuss up to a limb in sight of them Apaches. I know ther natur’ of ther varmints; it’ll set ’em thinkin’ so hard that they’ll hate most awful ter cum inter ther bottom arter dark.”

“That’s good, Clown!” answered Big Foot; “yer he’d ain’t holler. We can leave our nags right here an’ play tricks on ’em.”

The mustangs were secured in a manner that would allow them to feed, and then the Rangers got ready for work.

“Now, fu’stly,” commanded Big Foot, “scatter clean up-stream, each on yer a quarter a mile apart; git all ther dried deadwood an’ git it as near ther edge o’ ther puraria as yer can without bein’ seen. Then when yer are hearin’ an owl hoot rather nat’ral like, jist yer all light ther fires an’ git back here, then we’ll h’ist up Bear Claw whar the cuss can take his last look on ther Paches on ther blooming perairia.”

All made their way over the natural bridge, which was easily found by following the trail which led to the same from the *motte*, each wondering in their minds how the frail girl had the nerve to climb the dangerous tree, and pass over the dizzy hight, which they themselves found so difficult.

Their admiration of her courage and endurance was doubled after they reached the ground on the opposite side of the stream, and gazed back at the slender network of limbs over which she had made her way unassisted, weakened as she must have been by fasting, loss of sleep, and horrors which would have killed most men.

Jack Hodge, Clown and the Tonkaway glided up the river to the several points selected for the mysterious fires; while Big Foot made preparations to start his blaze at the border of the timber.

At the hoarse hooting of the owl, the signal agreed upon, each fire was lighted, and the deadwood limbs being dry as tinder sent up at once a volume of flame some six feet high.

It was but a short time before the giant scout was joined by the others, and all crawled up to the verge of the woods and peeped through the branches.

The sight that met their view more than repaid them for their trouble, for the Apache camp was in an uproar.

The four fires springing up simultaneously, at points where they had no idea any humans were located, not only puzzled them, but they were greatly alarmed.

As our friends peeped through, the Apaches were hurrying hither and thither, gesticulating and jabbering at a great rate.

“Now, Tonk!” exclaimed Big Foot, a broad grin overspreading his features, “jist snake yerself over ther drink, an’ fotch ther extra lariats; drag that are noble red-man down; hitch on ter ther cuss, an’ we’ll drag him across, an’ giv’ him a h’ist right over this fire.”

Before the scout had finished speaking Raven had disappeared on his mission, and in a short time he again came among the Rangers, dragging the body of Bear Claw, they both being dripping wet.

“Take that lariat, Tonk,” ordered Big Foot, “an’ scoot up ther tree, an’ run it round that limb, an’ be re’dy ter h’ist when I give ther word.”

The Tonkaway silently and cautiously did as he was directed. Below the limb was a large space quite open to the view of the Apaches upon the plain.

When all was ready, and Big Foot was about to give the signal for hoisting up the Indian, the Tonkaway suddenly sprang upright upon the limb and peered through the branches, uttering a grunt of surprise and pleasure.

“Whar yer drivin’ to now, Tonk?” cried Jack, noticing the strange manner of Raven. “Keep a stiff hold on yer line, an’ yer best eye on yer leaders. What’s a-goin’ on up ther road?”

A gesture of caution was made by Raven, who, with a gr n upon his usually stoical countenance, indicated that he was ready for Bear Claw.

Slowly the dead warrior was raised and held as high as the giant scout could reach; but Raven was not able to hoist the body alone, so Clown had to go to his assistance.

By their united exertions, the Comanche chief was placed in position facing outward, and in plain view of the Apaches.

Raven secured the slack end of the rope to the trunk of the tree, and followed Clown to the ground, as Big Foot exclaimed:

“Waal, I reckon Bear Claw are about as nigh ter heaven as he ever will git.”

But his attention was suddenly drawn from the swinging corpse by a low laugh which proceeded from the lips of the Tonkaway, which so surprised him, and his comrades, that they gazed at their Indian friend in silent astonishment, for they never had heard him laugh before.

Raven stood before them with folded arms, the laugh changed to a smile, the smile to a look of exultant ferocity, such as they had noticed upon him previous to or in the midst of a desperate fight.

“Are yer gittin’ iuny, Tonk?” asked Big Foot, eying the Indian closely.

“No—Raven no wild—Raven heap glad—Apache braves will sing death-songs—no see squaws more—Raven get heap scalp—Raven heap talk for white scouts—Raven eyes sharp.”

Then pointing, the Tonkaway designated a north-west direction, saying:

“Joe, Tom, Larry—ride fast. Here,” pointing west, “Wild Will—ride faster. Here,” pointing south, “Eagle Eye—ride fast, too—Apache look at fire—look at Bear Claw—no see white scouts—heap fun—heap scalps—fore dark comes—we move quick—get horses—then ready when time comes—Apache no warrior—they squaws—know nothing.”

Again the low, unnatural laugh, more strange coming from one who never indulged in mirth, broke from the lips of the Tonkaway.

The Rangers remained a moment silent from the veriest astonishment and gratification; then they wrung the hand of Raven, and sprang to their look-out at the verge of the timber.

The Apaches were gazing with superstitious awe at the strange fires and the swaying corpse; their whole attention was directed in that direction, and they had not as yet observed the also very strange sight behind them, of two single men coming like the wind toward them, and three more from another direction.

Big Foot crawled back away from the border of the woods, motioning his comrades to his side in a humid and excited way, and said:

“Cum on, an’ git fur ther horses; everything’s cummin’ out hunk. Hurrah fur our pards! We must be ready to take a hand!”

The whole of the party made fast time for the mustangs, eager to be in at the grand wind-up in prospect.

In the Indian camp, the braves seem to be not only greatly mystified at the unaccountable sights that they see in the river bottom, but their faces show that they attribute the fires, and swinging corpse to supernatural causes, as they do everything they cannot account for.

They now turn their gaze toward the point where the Texans had been, and see plainly that their foes had no hand in the strange appearance, for Big Foot and his party having galloped down beneath the friendly screen of the trees, have resumed their clothing, and taken their former position, leaving their mustangs fully equipped, ready for use.

Big Foot and his comrades could now easily watch the Apaches, and also have a plain view of their several friends, who were coming at great speed over the prairies, toward the band of Apache braves.

Full a mile nearer the Indians, than Reckless Joe and his companions, rode the Red Trailer. He was mounted upon a wild mustang, which he had in some manner captured, and had secured the saddle and bridle from his dead horse.

His appearance was more frightful than ever; his clothing was torn in shreds from riding his half-subdued horse through the brush, and his limbs were scratched and bleeding from the same cause.

His wild, piercing eyes were riveted on the Apache camp, and with insane cunning, he was silent, seeming to know that his yells would alarm his enemies, who were not aware of his approach.

The Indians still gazed with wonder and concern upon the bewildering sights amid the bottom-timber.

The long soft grass upon the prairie served to deaden the sound of the hoofs of the mustang ridden by the madman; but as he came on to within a quarter of a mile, their experienced ears detected his approach, and instantly all the Indians turned to the new wonder—of a single white man charging madly upon them.

They instinctively coiled up their lariats, but, not fearing any harm from a single horseman, they did not mount. A number drew their bows for use, and others poised their lances; but when the Red Trailer came near enough for them to observe closely his appearance, the arms were lowered, and all gazed in superstitious awe and dread at the new mystery.

When the madman saw that he was observed, his horrible yells filled the air, and his mustang fairly seemed to fly, covered with foam and filled with terror.

Making directly into the midst of the Apaches, they parted and shrunk back in consternation at the demented man now rushing upon them single-handed.

So strange and unaccountable had been the mysterious fires and the swinging corpse, that the sight of this unearthly figure was instantly

connected with them, by the Indians, and they, thinking that the Evil Spirit had certainly pounced upon them, became powerless, until the revolver of the madman sent death amid their crowded ranks; and before they could act on the defensive several had gone to answer for some of their bloody deeds.

Will emptied his six-shooter, then, being without a weapon, he made his frightened mustang plunge in among the terrified braves, wrenched a lance from one and impaled another, who was just drawing an arrow to shoot him at close range; then, reaching down from his saddle, he, with the strength of a giant, seized the Apache chief. Holding him above his head, perfectly powerless from being in the grasp of such a being, the wild rider drove spurs into his mustang, who plunged wildly, snorting with fear, and sprung clear of the war-party, and, unharmed, bounded down the river, disappearing beneath the branches below the point where the Rangers, under Big Foot, were waiting. With wild shouts the Rangers then mounted their horses and stood ready for a charge upon the demoralized Indians.

Instantly after the disappearance of Red Trailer with their chief, the Apaches sprang upon their steeds, and in a huddled mass, uncertain what to do, gazed about them.

To the north-west on came Joe, Tom and Larry, their Sharp’s rifles at a ready, and on came Kit in a thundering gallop on his roan prairie stallion, his hair flying in the wind, and without a hat, having something of the same appearance as the madman, and believed by the Indians to be another evil-spirit.

From the river charged Big Foot, Jack, Clown and the Tonkaway.

There was a moment of indecision as the Apaches glanced, in increased amazement, at the foes by which they were beset; then, with a fierce yell of desperation, they charged toward the three rangers coming from the north-west, preferring to cut them down rather than meet Kit, the supposed counterpart of Wild Will, to the south.

But as soon as Reckless Joe and his two comrades saw the Indians coming toward them, they halted and let fly with their rifles, giving them three volleys, one after another in quick succession, which caused such disorder that before they recovered, Kit, with his revolver, dashed entirely through their ranks, and afterward the balls from the party headed by Big Foot in their rear, cut them down like reeds.

Now came the grand charge of all. Kit turned his stallion, which had carried him some distance away, and headed again toward the Apaches at the same time that Reckless Joe’s party from one side, and Big Foot’s band from the other, with their deadly revolvers came down upon the doomed reds like an avalanche, and poured in lead like hail in a norther.

Texan yells, war-whoops and death-howls together with death-songs of wounded braves; the sharp volleys of revolvers; the twang of bow-strings, and hissing of arrows and bullets strangely and horribly blended together.

As the last death-yell broke on the air, as the last Apache gasped away his life, and while those who had been so strangely parted were grasping each other’s hands, Wild Will’s yell burst once more upon the prairie air, and he went thundering past toward the north, holding the Apache chief up before him.

The chief gave a horrified look at the dead braves, lying in one slaughtered pile on the plain; another of intense hate at the Texans; but this was changed again to horror as the Red Trailer’s yells burst forth, and he was borne away, he knew not where, and by—he knew not what; man or devil.

CHAPTER XXII.

POOR TONK!

THE reunited Rangers leaned upon their rifles, panting with exertion and excitement occasioned by the hard fighting of the last few minutes.

They gazed in wonder at Wild Will, whose mustang plunged madly over the prairie, the piercing yells of the crazy man at intervals reaching their ears, and they could see the long, gaudy-colored eagle-feathers of the Apache chief flying in the breeze, as the woodman would raise him above his head then fold the terrified warrior in his arms, as a child would play with a doll.

It was a most wonderful sight to those who had known Will Halliday when he was a sane man, surrounded by his happy family; and each and every one of the little band of heroes felt their hate for the Indian murderers increase tenfold after witnessing the wreck which grief had caused.

The attention of the Rangers was drawn back to their own vicinity by a wild, low chant which all recognized as the death-song of an Indian brave.

This started them, as they had supposed all the Apaches were dead.

Their surprise was turned to the deepest grief upon discovering that the death-song came from the lips of one whom they all loved as a brother.

It was Raven, the Tonkaway, whose absence

from their midst had not until this time been noticed.

Not ten feet from the main mass of the slain, seated upon the ground, and leaning against the dead body of his mustang, with three Apache braves, slain by his hand, stretched lifeless before him, was the faithful Tonkaway, the blood flowing from a dozen wounds.

With his last strength he had succeeded in scalping his foes, and held the dripping trophies in one hand, while he pressed a bunch of soft grass over what he knew was his death-wound.

There was a look of exultation in his eyes, as, with a weak voice, he recounted the valorous deeds he had performed in the death-chant of his tribe.

Instantly after the Rangers had discovered the situation of the Tonkaway, they sprung, as one man, to his side, hurling the dead Apaches away and kneeling beside him.

Through long years of service as a scout, Raven had endeared himself to them all, and served most faithfully Sam Houston, the "Great White Chief of Texas."

The lips and eyelids of brave men, unused to show emotion, quivered, as the feeble tones of the Tonkaway floated in the blood-tainted air.

The eyes of Raven were fixed upon the sky above, as if to catch a view of the unknown world, whose mysteries were soon to be unveiled to him.

The Rangers maintained a respectful silence until the death-song ended, and the eyes of Raven ran slowly around the circle, scanning their well-known faces.

A smile of pride and satisfaction overspread his features as each scout pressed his hand, and Big Foot held a gourd of water to his parched lips, which quivered with an agony his tongue was too proud to tell of.

After the draught of water was taken the dying warrior's face brightened, and he addressed the scouts, but in a very feeble voice:

"Warriors of the Star-land—Raven has made his last trail—the Great Spirit call him—when He call red or white they must go—Raven fight heap hard for Texas—you will speak to Placido, my chief—tell him Raven die with scalps in hand—that he sent many Apache on dark trail before him—tell Houston, White Chief of Texas—Raven clean trail and true tongue—follow Apaches to the North—Mary will be free—she will be squaw of Eagle Eye—you all great braves—Raven heap proud look in your eyes and die—you will bury Raven—no want Apache r Comanche to get scalp.—Look!—the warriors of my tribe come in the air—they will take Raven over the dark trail to the Great Spirit."

The Tonkaway here springing to his feet, gazed above at those things pictured to him by approaching death, his arms uplifted as if begging assistance from the azure heavens. Then the scalp and tuft of grass fell to the ground; the death war-whoop broke from his lips, as a fountain of crimson gore burst from the ghastly wound in his breast, and Raven fell into the many outstretched arms of the Rangers—a corpse.

They laid the dead hero tenderly upon the prairie flowers, while many a tear was brushed away by buckskin sleeves.

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Kit, with deep emotion, "there lays a white man with a red skin. He has lost his life in our service, and if I ever forget him may I be forgotten by those who owe me friendship. He was always faithful, and true as steel. I never knew him to tell a lie, and he never stopped to count fatigue, suffering from hunger or thirst, or to consider whether it was a long or short trail he started on when his services were asked. He was the most unselfish man, red or white, that I ever had the fortune to meet.

"Men talk of the Indians as if they were all alike. Was there anything in the character of Raven to be compared with those Apache carion there? He was as far above them as George Washington was above an African gorilla.

"I thank God, boys, that I have the pleasure of meeting you again in this life. I ran a slim chance for it, as you know. I regret more than words can tell the death of our noble red friend, and, as much as I hate to linger on this trail, I say we will stop to give him the honors of burial the same as if he was Governor of the Lone Star State."

"Kit!" exclaimed Big Foot, sadly, "if yer has got through, I'll jist sling a few remarks. You can talk a danged site better'n I can, I knows, but I don't reckon yer can feel wuss in yer heart 'n I do. I feels squeamish an' took down bad, fur I counted on ther Tonk heavy, fur ther work ahead on this trail. I knowed when I heard ther Tonk's laugh in ther bottom, yonder, that sumthin' were goin' ag'in' us. Boys, let's git fur ther bottom an' find sum grub o' sum kind. Take my nag, Joe, an' all on yer skarmish ahead. I'll tote Raven along myself; he shall go on ther long trail to t'other world with plenty of feed and arms in his hand, jist as he alwis told me ter fix him, if I was round when he lost his grip."

The Rangers proceeded to the river, leaving

Big Foot seated near the dead Raven, and after they were gone the giant scout indulged in a quiet soliloquy:

"Reckon the Tonk 'll go ter ther white man's heaven fur sure. I sha'n't be at all squeamish about mixin' with his sort, if he duz. I'm in hopes o' gittin' thar when my time comes, fur I've seen 'nuf of t'other place here. Goin' ter church reg'lar may make a man angelic-like, an' fit tew pass into kingdom-cum, an' look ther doorkeeper squar' in ther eye, without flinchin', or winkin', but I doubt it muchly, fur I knowed a heap o' gospel-slingers an' re'dy-made Christians what I w'ldn't trust ther lenth uv a lariat. We don't, sum on us, know nothin' about it, Raven, but if yer go ther same trail with them cussed Apache skum, I says things ain't strait, an' squar', an' I've got enuf confidence in ther Great Spirit, what made us all, Rocky Mount'ins counted in, ter think 'tain't so; fur yer dun yer best what yer knowed, an' that's all any on us can slide in on. Tonk, I reckon yer'll be wa'tin' fur me when I cum, whichever place I go, fur I don't brag on bein' better'n you was."

Big Foot now took the body of Raven up tenderly in his arms, and started on a quick pace toward the river, giving a deep scowl of hatred as he passed through the dead Apaches which covered the ground.

The Rangers had already started a fire, and each one was occupied in some self-imposed duty, connected with the preparation of food and the care of the horses.

Two dressed deer were hanging from the branches of a post-oak, shot as the Rangers had entered the bottom-timber, as the deer were drinking on the opposite bank of the river.

Big Foot left the body of Raven beneath the shade of the oaks near the border of the prairie, and joined his comrades, bringing an armful of deadwood for the camp-fire.

"Waal, boys," said the giant scout, "yer has got things worked up lively, an' I reckon thar's chances for a squar' feed, what we needs bad. Kit, yer lookin' blue. Don't reckon we'll lose much time 'round here, then we'll jist hump oursel's arter Mollie."

"Wallace," returned Kit, "I have, during the excitement of the fight, the reappearance of Wild Will, and the death of the Tonkaway, been forced to hold my feelings and tongue under control, but now I must ask you clearly and plainly—where is Mary?"

"Waal, 'bout Mollie: Jack, Clown an' myself, with ther help o' ther Tonk, got on her trail, an' ware closin' in on ther river here, when them cussed smoky-hided Apaches closed in on us. We had a hot time fur a spell, but cut our way tew timber, an' while we ware taking breath, an' wipin' out our Sharps', who sh'u'd cum on ther jump, ridin' Bear Claw's nag, but our Mollie. As we arterwards found out by clear sign, she killed ther cuss herself, an' hearin' our shooters bark she jumped his mustang an' p'inted fur our crowd, but ther nag war wild fur her, an' the 'Paches jist gobbled her up right afore our peepers, an' we couldn't sling a shot nor do nothing. They split, an' sum took Mollie, but I reckon we've got ther crowd what'll make 'em scratch dirt."

"How did Mary look when you saw her?" asked Kit; "and do you think they will treat her as bad as the Comanches? I know them well enough, but I like to have the opinion of others."

Jack Hodge now came up from the river, where the boys were having a bath, and exclaimed:

Halloo, Kit! haven't had time ter blow my horn at yer yet! How the dickens did yer git outen ther river, whar Will an' ther horse went over with yer? Reckon yer don't care much for a bath since yer took that twenty-foot plunge! Whar did yer light out fur, that we didn't raise yer? We shot a panther thar! and should 'a' thought you'd 'a' hearn our rifles?"

"I snared a mustang," answered Kit, "and made a clean streak down the river. I must have left some time before you boys arrived. I do not remember anything after Will made the rush into the Indians; next I knew, I found myself laying across Will's dead horse, on the bank of the river. Will came up, shortly after I returned to my senses, and cooked some horse-meat for me. I left him asleep by the fire."

"Phat yer thinks o' that Misther Jack?" exclaimed Larry, standing near; "I towld yees I seen the devil, but 'pon me soul I thought he was afther bain dead; an' bedad, as I seen him on ther praria beyond, he was more like a spirit than a human, an' I'm thinkin' the Evil One himself 'as enlisted him! Be the powers o' pewther but it's glad I am to see you, Misther Big Fut! Shure I was lost intirely away from ye. I beg ye pardon, Misther Kit, but are yees any relative to the wild man on the horse?"

"He is no relative of mine, Larry," answered Kit, "but I hope he will be sometime. You would think better of him had you known him before the murder of his family. I know that an Irishman generally says what is in his mind, and have no hard feelings toward you for your expressing yourself in regard to Mr. Halliday, or the Red Trailer, as the boys now call him; and I think it is a name well won. My mother

was Irish, God bless her, and my heart is warm toward all who are from the same old sod. Give me your hand, Larry; we shall be friends, I know."

"God be wid ye!" exclaimed Larry, with satisfaction beaming from every feature as he grasped the hand of Kit. "Sure, 'pon me soul, 'tis a happy day fur me, and the grass looks graner, an' the sun shines brighter since gittin' a grip at an Irish hand, avin ef there is Yankee blud mixed wid that same."

"Look a-here, Larry," interrupted Tom Clark, "how duz yer know but what that panther was Irish? I reckon he cum to ther scratch 'bout as game as John Morrissey ever did, an' got his back up 'bout as quick; but I'll bet yer, boys, Larry jist beat him gay on ther dive—"

And Tom lay back and roared with laughter. A scowl of wrath crept over Larry's face, but it turned to a smile, as Tom uttered the last portion of his remark.

"Shure, Misther Tom," said Larry, "I'm glad ye are afther sp'akin' about that same big cat, for I'm wantin' ter know if thar bees many ev them same hairy divels around this place, fur 'tisn't ofthen I'd loike to mate wid 'em. I can't say I loike the look of ther eyes; the one Misther Big Fut hav' at his ranch tied up has a look about him what makes me think of the Evil One hisself."

"Gentlemen," said Reckless Joe, as he approached the circle of Rangers, "why dost wag thy tongues in idle prattlings when there is that in plenty that will give your jaws more agreeable and profitable satisfaction? Here, beneath the greenwood trees, is spread a feast such as kings might well covet; and in such quantities that even famished men like you can satisfy yourselves. Come and recuperate your exhausted systems, for time waits for no man."

The Rangers needed no second invitation, and all were soon seated around upon the mossy banks, near the fire, to partake of venison steaks broiled to a golden brown by Clown, hard biscuits and coffee—the latter prepared by Reckless Joe, who prided himself in that particular and most essential beverage of the prairies.

How much they missed the presence of Raven at the feast was plainly seen, as they often cast mournful glances toward the bank upon which his mutilated body lay, cold in death; but men so situated, and so often brought face to face with death, not knowing, when they lay down upon the plain to sleep, if they will ever awaken in this world, do not harbor gloomy thoughts or encourage them in others by speaking too often of those who have been suddenly taken from their circle by death, although their grief is perhaps as deep as with those in other walks of life who make a greater show of it under the same circumstances.

CHAPTER XXIII. ON TRAIL AGAIN.

AFTER the Rangers had satisfied their hunger, Larry was sent down the river to head the mustangs up-stream, as the animals had been allowed free range; for no danger was apprehended at this point after the hard fighting so near their camp.

It was not ten minutes after the Irishman had left the camp, and all were seated enjoying their pipes, when they were brought to their feet by a series of yells, so strange and unusual to all, except Joe and Tom, that they gazed in wonder and apprehension down the river, from which point the strange sounds proceeded.

They could see some distance, but brush waist high covered the space between the oaks.

The Rangers had not long to look, for soon Larry, without his hat, and eyes glaring with terror, was observed making leaps and plunges through the brush like, as Tom remarked, "a jack-rabbit on the wing."

On came Larry, at intervals jerking his head around, and glancing over his shoulders as if some terrible phantom was in pursuit of him.

Every Ranger, except Tom and Joe, sprung for their rifles, the two latter rolling on the grass, convulsed with laughter, much to the astonishment of the others.

Larry at last, torn, bleeding, panting, and horror-struck, bounded into camp, and fell flat upon the ground at the feet of Kit; then turning over, he gazed down the river and up into the trees above his head.

"What in thunder'n littenin's ther row now, Larry?" exclaimed Big Foot. "Hav' ther reds run in ag'in on us? Reckon ther country's full on 'em, boys."

"Don't fret yerself," burst from Tom, nearly choking from laughter; "he's only got up a race with a panther, or sumthin' o' that sort."

Kit took the Irishman by the collar and raised him on his feet; cold beads of sweat were standing upon Larry's forehead, and his eyes were fixed and staring with great fear.

"See here, Larry," said Kit, "speak quick; what have you seen down the creek—Indians? If so, spit it out right here and no foolishness."

"Howly Mother o' Moses! God save us all, an' stand betune us an' all harum," jerked out Larry, still gazing up amid the branches of the trees; but seeing nothing, and having his friends about him, he became composed, and spoke more to the point. "Powers o' pewther, I don't

see him now, b'ys. Shure I'm not backward, but alwis to the fore fightin' the red h'athen whin they cums dacent an' human loike upon foot or horseback, but whin they bees so thick they flies in the air, devilish in the exframe, I can't be affther standin' that, b'ys."

"What do you mean?" demanded Kit; are you getting crazy, as you thought likely a while ago?"

"Crazy is it?" answered Larry, trembling in every limb. "Shure I'm not far frum that same. Another day loike this w'u'd make a wild man ev me, God save me!"

At this moment Larry caught sight of Tom and Joe laughing immoderately, which madened him, and he burst out again:

"Yees thinks it's nothin' to see slathers o' wild divels av Injuns flying in the air, paint, feathers, an' all, and them same makin' grabs at me wid thar arms."

Clown, who had grasped his rifle at Larry's first yell, and sprung down the river, now returned, a broad grin upon his usually sober countenance, and explained the cause of the Irishman's fright.

"Yer see, boys, we slung Bear Claw up a limb so the reds c'u'd see him, an' ther breeze has set ther cuss a-whirlin' round. He looks rather out of place, an' I has ter g'in in myself that he w'u'd giv' most any one a start what didn't know he war there, an' cumin' on him suddent like as Larry did."

All hands joined in the laugh at Larry, who was very much offended.

"Yees can all laugh as much as ye hav' a mind, but divil a one av ye but w'u'd a' run. I'm rememberin' a time whin, big scouts as yees are, ye ware affther tryin' to shoot Injuns what was as dead as Biddy Murphy's pig."

"Larry," said Tom, "I left my canteen out on ther perrara, whar we had ther fight; it lays near them dead Apaches. If yer'll go an' git it fur me, I'll giv' yer a plug o' terbac."

"Shure, I'd loike to oblige yer, Mister Tom, but ef I never smoke a pipe ag'in—be gripes, ef ye'd give me the hull Shtate of Taxus, an' 'twas all red solid gould, I'd not go fur yer canteen. I'm just saying—I don't want nothin' to do wid dead folks."

"Boys!" exclaimed Big Foot, as he returned his pipe to his belt-pouch, "I reckon we'd better hustle round, fur Kit are anxious ter git on ther trail, an' I don't know of any cn us but what's in same box. Now yonder's a place ter lay Raven, an' a tall percon fur a monument. Claw out ther sand, boys, an' make a hole, an' I'll go fur the Tonk."

The Rangers all set to work immediately, and scooped out a grave in the spot designated—Larry seated some distance away, smoking and muttering to himself.

Big Foot soon returned with the body of Raven, which was rolled up in a blanket, together with his knife, revolver, and an Apache bow with a quiver of arrows; there was also a haunch of venison laid by the side of the Indian in the grave, as he had often requested should be done, if he lost his life while with the Rangers.

Kit was again called upon for a prayer, and with uncovered heads, bowed with respectful attention and sincere grief, these sons of the prairies listened to the words which fell from the lips of their brother scout, until he ended; then five revolvers were fired over the grave.

All fired at the same time, the reports echoing up and down the river, causing the owls to flap their wings in fear, and the coyotes to slink still deeper into their hiding-places.

Each Ranger placed a bouquet of prairie flowers upon the breast of their respected friend and red brother; then the loose sand was pushed into the grave, and leaves scattered over it, making it look the same as the ground around it, so that no one, except upon close scrutiny, could detect that the ground had been disturbed.

The Rangers scattered here and there, catching their horses, and soon all were in the saddle. Big Foot and Kit took the lead. They glided past the grave of the Tonkaway, out of the bottom timber into the open plain; here they spurred their mustangs into a gallop up the trail taken by the Apaches who held Mary captive.

Each Ranger was more or less wounded, but no word of complaint escaped their lips as they silently loped over the prairie, almost broken down by over-exertion, want of sleep and painful wounds—riding on, spurring on, perhaps to death by lingering torture.

But the knowledge that a beautiful girl, who, through grief, pain and privation, had shown a heroism worthy of a queen, was a captive among the butchers of the prairies, kept them from giving a thought to their own sufferings and bodily weakness, and their powerful wills took them on the path of vengeance to the rescue of virtue from worse than death.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CAVE OF DEATH.

HOPE died in the breast of poor Mary, as, bound fast to the horse of the dead Comanche chief, surrounded by Apache braves in their hideous war-paint, she was borne away from the

scene of the fight and her friends with the speed of the wind.

She noticed that a part of the Indians had been left behind, and had no doubt it was for the purpose of killing or capturing her friends, whom she had recognized from the battle-field.

Although she had great respect for their bravery, and considered Big Foot Wallace almost invincible as an Indian-fighter, she hardly dared to cherish the hope that they would be able to cope successfully with so formidable a force as had been left behind.

She knew that Kit was not among the Rangers, and this troubled her more than her captivity, for she had passed through so much of late that she thought she would be willing to die, if she could only see him once more; but they were now taking her further and further away from the settlements, and Mary realized that every bound of her mustang made her rescue more doubtful and a life of misery and degradation more certain.

Was her beauty a blessing or a curse to her? This thought passed through her mind often, knowing that, had she been old and ill-favored, her scalp would have hung at an Indian's belt ere this; but as it was, every savage chief she had come in contact with, cast looks of admiration at her, and one had lost his honor and his life by being captivated by her beauty.

This he had told her himself, and now she was to listen again to the tale from lips to which soft words were strangers.

War Eagle, the Apache chief, who had been riding near and observing her, suddenly urged his horse alongside of hers, and taking the lariat which was attached to her animal, caused both horses to spring away ahead of the party.

Mary cast her eyes at the chief in a side glance, and observed that he was finely molded, with far less of the hideous in his face than any Indian she had ever seen.

He was tall and slender, and a graceful horseman; his features were very regular for an Indian, and she also noticed that his war-dress was beautifully decorated with fancy bead-work, while a red silk sash was worn about his waist in the style of the Rio Grande Mexicans.

Both mustangs went away over the prairie far ahead of the war-party; then the Apache chief leaned over from his saddle and cut the thongs which bound the hands of the captive, who gave him a look of thanks, for she was suffering greatly from the cruel manner she had been secured, as her wrists were sore from the same torture she had endured at the hands of the Comanches.

The thankful looks of Mary perhaps encouraged the chief, for he had not opened his lips; but now the words sprung from his mouth like arrows shot from his bow:

"Look!" exclaimed the chief, proudly pointing back to his braves; "War Eagle great chief! His lodge-pole bends low with scalps. Look!" said he, with the bearing and tone of a king, as he waved his hand and directed her view over the prairies, which stretched away to the horizon; "War Eagle rides where he wants—no man dare say stop! When War Eagle speak, buffalo come fast into hunting-grounds of his people—they are never hungry—the Pecos is never dry—the bear, the antelope and deer all stop when War Eagle draws bow—the birds sing sweet—flowers bloom always about his lodge—but it is empty when he is on war-party—all is still in his buffalo-skin house—it shall be so no more—the white flower of the pale-faces shall be his squaw—her eyes shall weep when he leaves his lodge for war—War Eagle heart big and warm—the Prairie Flower shall have rest there—her voice will be sweet to his ears. Let Prairie Flower speak: will she be squaw of War Eagle, or will she sing her death-song in the torture-fire when the warriors call for her blood?"

"The daughter of a pale-face," answered Mary, "thanks the red-man for his kindness; but the Great Spirit," and she raised her white delicate arms heavenward, "has told her she must not mate with those who have spilt the blood of her family. Prairie Flower, as you call me, can wither and die; you can cast her into the torture-fire; but never again will your bow shoot straight; your war-cries shall be weak as an infant's wail; and your people will droop and die, like the old leaves upon the tree. Death and dishonor follow the trail of Prairie Flower. When the sun came up from the plain this morning she was the captive of Bear Claw the Comanche chief; this is his mustang!" A guttural "Ugh!" came from the Apache chief's lips at the mention of Bear Claw, followed by a scowl of intense hatred; but he waved Mary to go on.

"She was a captive to the Comanche chief, now she is in the power of War Eagle, and Bear Claw has gone to the happy hunting-grounds of his tribe; his death-yell shook the leaves on the banks of the Guadalupe."

As Mary spoke the last words in an exultant voice, War Eagle jerked the lariats bringing both mustangs upon their haunches; and leaping to the ground he carefully examined the saddle and bridle of the horse upon which Mary was borne.

His features, so recently disfigured by a hideous scowl, now assumed a gratified expression.

"Who kill Bear Claw?" asked War Eagle, exultantly.

Mary, who was in such a state of desperation at being recaptured, regardless of consequences—for she was ignorant of the fact that the Comanches and Apaches were at war with each other—leaned toward the chief, and with a voice, in which were blended the bravado and fearlessness so much admired and respected by all Indian tribes, she answered:

"Prairie Flower! with the strength given her by the Great Spirit!"

The Apache chief gazed at the young girl in silent wonder and admiration. Proud and warlike as he was he seemed to recognize her as a superior.

War Eagle then sprung upon his mustang again, and, turning the animal to face his approaching war-party, he gave a long, piercing yell that brought his braves around him in a moment's time.

Running his eyes around among those who had followed him in many a wild fight, he waved his hand over toward his fair captive, drawing their attention to her.

"Warriors of the Apaches—listen to the words of your chief—keep them in your ears. Look!—the white squaw is a great warrior—she is brave as the big bear of the mountains—cunning as the panther of the Pecos—she has killed the great war-chief of the Comanches—her knife is red with the blood of the enemy of our tribe—Bear Claw has gone to the land beyond the moon—she has killed the enemy of War Eagle—she shall be queen of our tribe—she shall keep warm and welcome the lodge of your chief. War Eagle has spoken—he who harms Prairie Flower dies the death of a dog."

The Indians gazed upon Mary with looks of amazement not unmixed with awe, for they knew their chief had positive proof of what he had asserted.

Mary was now the center of attraction as she rode by the side of War Eagle, as much surprised as the Indians at the turn affairs had taken in her favor.

She felt that by this change in their feelings toward her she would be treated well, and, also, that she would have more chances to escape.

Two days before she would have been frightened terribly at the sight of an Indian; now she rode among a large war-party of the most murderous and revengeful tribe upon the American continent almost unconcerned.

The horrible massacre of her family was continually before her eyes, but her great grief and deep hatred of her captors were kept within bounds, and her brain was ever active, noticing the course taken by them and the movements of the Indians.

Had it not been for the knowledge that Kit loved her, and that her poor father roamed the plains a raving maniac, she would not have cared to live, and would have welcomed death, in any form, as a mercy. Mary felt that God would, as He had so far, preserve her from harm, and that He would through His infinite mercy find some way of releasing her from her enemies, and restore her to her lover.

Her thoughts and her dreams now would be of her father and Kit; she must live—she must escape!

Her faith was strong, and she had great need of it in the situation in which she was placed. She felt that, in a day, she had changed from a timid girl to a resolute woman, who would allow nothing, however discouraging, to break her spirit.

The Apaches, who had been traveling at great speed, now turned their course from west to north, and struck in among the hills near the source of the Guadalupe, which, at this point, was only a small stream.

Here, by the banks of this creek, Mary was left with a small guard, while the main body of the braves, with War Eagle in the lead, taking with them their dead, bound upon mustangs, proceeded through the thick woods up the side of a range of hills, until they came to a dense almost impenetrable thicket; but they were well acquainted with the ground, as on the west side of the thicket they followed each other up a narrow trail, which ran directly to a precipitous wall of rock, the base of which was shaded by overhanging trees and vines, to such an extent that it was dark and somber as a tomb.

And such it proved to be, for War Eagle alighted from his mustang at the entrance of an extensive cave, and motioned those who had the dead warriors in charge to ride forward.

Horse after horse, with its fearfully ghastly load, was led into the cave, and a large fire was soon burning inside to light up the rocky chamber of death.

The animals were led along by the wall of the cave. Their masters who had ridden them in the wild charge, with fierce, revengeful war-cries, were now cold in death, bound to the saddles—their lips mute, their war-paint a horrible mockery.

The flames leaped and crackled in forked points, flaring here and there, in the damp, shivering air; the crystal stalactites hanging

from the vaulted roof in solid, but graceful pendants, threw back ten thousand glittering rays, and turned the gloomy chamber into a diamond-studded cathedral.

Nature's church, with Nature's children for worshippers—vengeance their creed, their heaven reached only through rivers of blood of their own shedding, their positions, station and reward in this world and the next, depending upon the number of scalp which hung from belt or lodge-pole.

All along the side of the cavern in single file, near the dripping wall, were ranged the mustangs and their dead riders, the sightless eyeballs of the latter sending out a stony, vacant glare, which, as the firelight played upon them, set in the horrible framework of war-paint and flaunting feathers, presented a dreadful picture.

About the fire, surrounding it and their chief, were the living braves, gazing at their dead brothers with a calmness and unconcern devoid of all grief.

Being killed in battle was the highest and most honorable death they could die; then why should they mourn?

Suddenly War Eagle stalked from the fire toward the dead braves, and, standing firm as a rock between them and the fire, he threw up his arms as if calling the attention of the dead to himself and addressed them:

"Brothers! Apache braves! Warriors of the Pecos! War Eagle is no more your chief—the Great Spirit has called you to the prairies beyond the moon—it is a long trail—you cannot walk—War Eagle knows you wait for your mustangs—your bows, lances, knives are with you—your trail may be filled with enemies—meat of the deer shall be with you—you must not weaken and faint—you will see no game upon the long, dark trail. We will feed your squaws—we will wipe the tears from their eyes. Brothers! War Eagle says farewell, but he will join you before many moons, he feels it in his heart."

As War Eagle ceased speaking, a score of dark forms sprung past him in the firelight, and stationed themselves within ten feet of the mustangs and dead braves. A score of arrows were fitted to bowstrings, and each warrior, with his left foot forward and body leaning back, braced by his right, drew the deadly bow until the feathered shafts touched their shoulders.

The strings twanged, the arrows cut the air, and with dull thuds were buried feather-deep in the vitals of the devoted mustangs who had been selected to carry their dead masters on the trail of death.

Long, horrible screams of agony sprung from the poor suffering steeds, as they reared, plunged, staggered and fell, the hot blood spurting in every direction; while the braves chanted together a mournful death-song, in good keeping with the dreadful scene of blood before them.

Horses and dead warriors were bathed in the sanguine flood, which had splattered the brilliant crystal walls in every direction. The shrieks, plungings, moans and gasps of dying steeds, mingled with the low guttural chant of the Apaches, lasted some ten minutes; then all was silent as death in that jeweled-walled cathedral, carpeted with blood.

The flickering flames were quenched by the fast-flowing gore, and darkness shut out the horrible scene forever.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE WARNING.

AFTER the return of War Eagle and his band from the cave of death, the mustangs were all herded under a strong guard where the animals could graze until darkness set in, and a number of braves were sent out to shoot the game necessary for the evening and morning meals.

War Eagle had no fears of an attack, not thinking that there were any whites in the vicinity except the small party who had been left under the espionage of his braves down the Guadalupe, and he was confident they would be easily overpowered, and either killed or taken captive, before morning, by the portion of his war-party left for that purpose.

War Eagle was well aware that his encampment was within twenty miles of Camp Verde, but had no fears from that quarter, for he knew there were but a few infantry soldiers at that post.

A small bower, made from green branches entwined together, had been erected by order of the chief for Mary; and she sat inside without being bound, although she noticed that some of the Indians were constantly near her shelter, and that they watched her every motion.

This she attributed to their curiosity more than to any suspicion on their part that she would attempt an escape.

The notoriety she had gained by the killing of Bear Claw caused the Indians to show her double the attention they would to an ordinary captive.

A quantity of moss had been collected, and with a blanket spread over this, Mary formed an easy couch, and was glad to relieve her tired and weary limbs by resting on it.

Years seemed to have passed since the fearful massacre of her family, and she tried to school her mind to think only of the living.

That Kit would follow the Apaches as long as he saw any hope, she was confident; and she had no idea that her father would stray away from his ruined ranch.

She had heard his fearful yells when charging into the Comanche camp, and she reasoned that if he had been possessed of his senses, he would have been the first to try and rescue her.

While her thoughts ran on in this strain, the sun slowly sunk in the west, and the savory smell of cooking meats came to her from the camp-fires outside.

She felt hungry, and was glad it was so, for she needed strength, and was sure in her own mind that a good night's sleep would recuperate her sufficiently to make a bold push for liberty. No! that would not do. She must be cautious, and steal away in the night time, and secrete herself where the Indians could not find her.

In thinking over this last plan of escape she knew she would need arms to protect herself, and determined to get them in some manner.

She also thought of a horse, and the mustang of Bear Claw, she had noticed, now seemed to be more at ease, and friendly in her company, and she determined to try kindness and pet him, and when once upon his back and free of the camp, they could not overtake her, as the horse was noted for great speed and bottom.

She resolved to be ready and take advantage of any circumstance in her favor, and watch well lest she should miss a chance.

A shadow darkened the entrance of the bower, and the Apache chief stood before her.

"Prairie Flower is weak," said War Eagle; "she must have meat—when dark comes, she will sleep—she will be strong, when sun comes—then we go on Pecos trail—she have much trouble—much hard ride—have long rest soon, where flowers plenty—birds will sing sweetly to Prairie Flower on the Pecos."

The chief called to a warrior who approached with venison and parched corn, which he placed before Mary upon a large green lily-leaf, torn from its home in the bed of the stream.

"Prairie Flower thanks War Eagle for his kindness," said Mary.

"War Eagle wants no thanks—when Prairie Flower is strong—when blood-paint is on her cheek he will be happy—Prairie Flower has slain the Comanche snake—War Eagle is glad—the scalp of his brother hangs in the lodge of Bear Claw—War Eagle's hate was strong—his knife was sharp—his mustangs like the wind—but he no kill Comanche dog. The squaws of our nation shall not walk the same trails as Prairie Flower—she shall be 'Queen of the Pecos.'"

And War Eagle waved an adieu with the grace and air of a prince.

Mary took advantage of his leaving to partake of a hearty meal, after which she prepared a place for the night's repose, with blankets left her for that purpose. She then took a look outside of the shelter. It was a wild, savage scene: a dozen bright fires were scattered here and there amid the bottom-timber, and about these fires were Apache warriors, cooking and feasting, for they had found deer and antelope in plenty not far from the camp.

It was now quite dark, and the fires threw out, each, its circle of light, showing off the flitting figures of the dusky war-painted man-brutes, and making Mary think of the fiends who inhabit Hades, as they had often been pictured to her imagination. There was a constant hum, a dreamy, murmuring sound hovering over the camp, made by the Indians as they conversed in low, guttural tones in their own peculiar language, but no loud voice which could have been heard at any great distance.

As Mary stood observing her surroundings, with dark forebodings for her future depressing her mind, there came a rush, a thundering of many hoofs as the mustangs were driven in, and secured within the line of guards.

The camp was situated some distance in the timber, below the level of the prairies, which lay south.

Mary retired to her couch, wrapped the blankets about her, and having been without sleep for so long a time, was soon in a deathlike slumber.

Many times War Eagle bent over her sleeping form, and afterward withdrew with grunts of satisfaction at seeing that his fair captive was enjoying the rest she so much needed.

The Apaches, one after another, rolled themselves in their blankets, and in an hour after the horses were driven in, and the guard posted, the camp was silent, and the red-men were sleeping as do innocent babes.

The fires smoldered low, and darkness hovered over all, so it was impossible to distinguish the position of the sentinels.

At midnight the guard was relieved, and a hazy, dull moon partially lit up the camp.

The warriors just returned from their long watch, threw upon the main or chief fire a few armfuls of wood previous to their retiring, and ignited the same by blowing at the coals; they then lit their pipes, and seated themselves about the blazing wood, for they were chilled by the

heavy dew, which in that section of the country almost equals a shower of rain.

They had been seated but a few moments when all were brought to their feet by the thundering of a horse, at full gallop, coming over the plain above.

The deathlike stillness of the bottom made each bound of the animal distinctly heard, and great was the surprise of the Apaches, for their practical ears detected by the labored lope, that the steed was ridden and controlled by man.

Before the alarm could be given by the sentinels who were dumb with surprise at a single horseman coming upon them, and he a white man—for they knew no Indian would come in that way—the whole war-party sprung from their blankets, and awaited in great surprise to see what manner of man was about to favor them with a visit.

They had not long to wait, for down the bank from the prairie above, through the guard, into the midst of the camp—none opposing him—came the Red Trailer, bearing in his arms the Apache chief, more dead than alive—the madman having tortured the Indian by repeated stabs in the body, now reeking in blood!

As Will entered the circle of firelight his frightful appearance and wild yells, which now broke forth, sent a thrill of superstitious horror through the whole mass of Apaches, who shrunk from his path as from the Evil Spirit of their traditions.

Red Trailer held the Apache chief, many times wounded by his knife, high in the air as he bounded into the camp, and as he came abreast of the Indians who were huddled about War Eagle, he hurled the savage with a giant's strength through the air into their midst.

One moment the madman and his mustang were stationary in the full blaze of the firelight, presenting a sight such as sent a thrill of horror through the Apaches, which seemed to take away all their senses, except sight; for not one arm was raised against the maniac rider.

Mary, awakened by the yells and confusion, sprung to the entrance of her bower, and saw her father, just at the time he halted, his horse panting, covered with foam and blood. The hair of the madman was flying in disorder, his garments and flesh were torn, and his wild eyes gazing tauntingly at the horde of terrified Apaches.

One long, yearning cry came from her lips as she sprung toward him.

"Oh, father!"

That cry broke the spell that was upon them all, and Red Trailer's mustang jumped directly into and through the mass of Indians as he pricked the animal savagely with his bowie-knife.

Demoniacal yells burst from the throat of Wild Will as he plunged on through the timber toward the Cave of Death, at the same time a thick shower of arrows, lances and tomahawks hurtled through the air; but the Indians were so confused, and so huddled together, that the madman was not unhorsed, and soon his wild, unearthly cries died away as he left the vicinity of the camp, going to the northward.

Poor Mary sunk to the earth as she saw her father in such peril.

Her heart was almost broken at witnessing his dreadful plight, and she realized with horror that, face to face with him, he did not know her!

After the disappearance of Red Trailer, War Eagle sprung to the assistance of Mary, and carried her back to the bower, laying her upon the blankets without speaking a word, then left to rejoin his warriors, where they were collected about the form of the Indian who had returned to his brother braves in so strange and mysterious a manner.

As War Eagle approached, the warriors opened a way for him, and he entered the circle of which the large camp-fire formed the center.

The Indian who had been hurled into their midst by the madman, now lay upon a blanket near the fire, and it was evident to all that his time was short.

The blood flowed in little streams from a dozen wounds inflicted by the bowie of Wild Will. As War Eagle came near to the dying brave, the latter's eyes brightened, and he strove to raise himself upon his elbows.

A saddle was placed at his back, and War Eagle seated himself opposite.

"Black Hawk comes back to his chief alone," said War Eagle, sternly; "where are his braves?—who is the White Devil that rides in the night?—where are the long-shooting pale-faces? Speak! War Eagle's ears are open!"

A drink of water was given to the dying brave, who answered faintly:

"Wolves of the prairies tear the flesh of the warriors of Black Hawk—the white Rangers shot fast—they came from north, south, east and west—their guns shoot many bullets—they flew like the frozen rain from the north—they gave no time for death-songs—not one is left but Black Hawk—his last war-cry has been heard on the Pecos—"

"The Evil Spirit drove away their cunning and bravery; he is the Evil Spirit of the red-men—blood and death follow fast on his trail—"

let War Eagle beware of the White Devil—he rides like the north wind—he howls like the thunder of the Great Spirit—War Eagle ride fast to the Pecos—the long-shooters are on trail—danger and dishonor go with the white squaw—let her die by the torture-fire—I have spoken—night grows dark—Black Hawk's trail points beyond the moon—

The words of the dying chief turned into the low chant of the death-song as he composed his limbs, and gazed with a vacant stare up into the starlit sky.

The Indians kept their places: not a word was spoken, not a sound broke the silence of the night except the low voice of Black Hawk, as he recounted his deeds of war and chase, but soon the mournful sound ceased, and Black Hawk was cold in death.

As the sub-chief gave his last convulsive gasp War Eagle rose to his feet, and speaking in a loud voice said:

"Warriors of the Pecos—you have heard the words of Black Hawk—our brother braves are food for the wolves—the fast-shooting whites are on our tracks—we are but few—we must ride fast toward the setting sun—your mustangs have eat grass—we must be on the prairies before light comes—my warriors will be ready when War Eagle gives the black wolf's yelp—I have spoken."

The chief waved his hand and his braves sprung quickly to collect arms and blankets, and to saddle their mustangs for the night's march.

War Eagle strode to the shelter in which Mary sat weeping bitter tears.

He stood an instant with a stern visage and folded arms at the entrance to the bower, and spoke to her:

"Prairie Flower is graceful as the spotted fawn—her cheek is painted like the sky, when prairies burn—her hair is soft and shines like the threads of the young corn—her eyes are like the dove, but the dove does not weep—the heart of War Eagle is sad—Prairie Flower has called the Red Trailer father—he has sent many braves on the long dark trail—he, the father of Prairie Flower. Will Prairie Flower say no?—will she please the heart of War Eagle? The big bear of the mountain does not claim for his child the little fawn of the prairie."

Mary sprung to her feet, her hair hanging in disheveled masses over her shoulders to her waist, her cheeks wet with tears, her eyes flashing fire.

Thus she stood, showing a strong spirit of anger and despair, which calmed the chief, as she cried out:

"The Red Trailer, as you call him, is my father, and were he to kill the last red-man upon the plains, it would be but justice, for they have ruined him and his. Were the white men to steal into your lodge in the night, and torture your wife, your mother, your babe to death before your eyes would you sit calmly down and weep for your loss?"

"My father three suns ago had a wife, mother and baby-boy. The Comanches came in the night and he has nothing; all have been swept away in a stream of blood and fire, and the loss has driven him to madness; do you wonder at this?"

"The Great Spirit has laid a heavy hand upon the head of my poor father, and the red-men must take care, for he has the strength of the buffalo, and knows not the want of food, sleep or rest."

"He will be on your trail always; you will never sleep safely again if you take the Prairie Flower to the far away Pecos."

"Your trail will be marked by the blood and wolf-gnawed bones of your braves. A dark cloud hangs over War Eagle and his braves; let Prairie Flower go back to the Medina, and the cloud will burst."

"Kit, the Eagle Eye Carson, is on your trail; he has sworn to rescue the Prairie Flower, and he never breaks his word, and the Great Spirit will help him keep it."

"Before another moon comes to light the night there will not be enough of your braves left to save the scalps of the dead from Dishonor."

Mary was forced here to stop speaking, for her words were so bitter, and so vehemently spoken that she had to pause for breath.

War Eagle gazed at her in silent admiration until she had ended, then answered her, slowly and thoughtfully:

"When the sun went down the voice of Prairie Flower was sweet as singing birds—now, it is like the croak of the raven. Does Prairie Flower think War Eagle can be frightened by words? The Red Trailer may come—he will never leave the Apache camp again! The Eagle Eye may come—War Eagle will not show his back—he will not die alone—if he die—Prairie Flower shall die with him. She will go on the long dark trail with the Apache chief. If no my squaw here she my squaw there. Come!—War Eagle is ready—Prairie Flower will ride toward the setting sun—she will go with War Eagle—"

An Indian now galloped up leading the horses of the chief and Mary; the former assisted the nearly-disheartened girl into the saddle, and

then jumped upon his own horse, gave the yelp of the black wolf, and two-score snorting steeds with their red riders, bounded through the bottom timber and dashed over the prairies through the darkness to the north-west.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LEAP TO DOOM.

THREE days of hard riding, after War Eagle and his band left the head-waters of the Guadalupe, brought them to the foot of Mount Bonita, situated on the Pecos river.

By crossing the river they would be in their own hunting-grounds, but their mustangs were so fagged that War Eagle decided to rest here and recruit the animals before fording the river.

Mary, thus far, had had no opportunity to escape, for the Indians had kept a strict watch upon her. The long ride had worn upon her greatly, both bodily and mentally, for, as league after league of prairie was passed, she realized how hard a task it would be for the Rangers to follow, and also she knew there would be small chance of her ever again returning to her former home, after once crossing the Pecos and being taken into the mountain strongholds of the Apaches.

War Eagle selected a camping-spot at the foot of Mount Bonita, near a spring of cool water which bubbled from the rocks.

The mountain rose in almost a perpendicular wall of rock above the camp, and before it to the eastward stretched the prairie, away to the distant horizon.

Opposite the camp—the fires of which were in a long line by the base of the mountain—the mustangs were herded, and were making up for lost time by tearing the rich grass in huge mouthfuls from the sod.

War Eagle had chosen a favorable position for defense, as large detached bowlders lay about at intervals, while by the spring was a grove of towering cottonwoods.

No enemy could approach from up or down the river without being seen by the sentinels stationed one at each side of the mountain, high up upon the rocky steep, where they could command an extended view.

The east was an open prairie as far as eye could reach, and the coming of friend or foe, in the light of day, could be known long enough ahead of their arrival to be ready to receive them.

With the mountain at their backs they could not be surrounded, and could easily hold their own against four times their number. It was true, in the night the look-outs would not be able to observe the approach of an enemy, but War Eagle hoped to cross the Pecos before the whites, did they follow his trail, would have time to reach the mountain. Upon this, the first night after their long and rapid ride from the Gaudalupe when they had a chance to sleep, War Eagle himself posted the guard, picking the best warriors for that important duty.

Strict instructions were given by the Apache chief to the sentinels to watch the eastward approach, keep their ears open, and give the alarm if there was any sign or indication of the approach of the long and fast-shooting Rangers.

After War Eagle had finished giving his orders and inspecting the camp, he sauntered to the place where Mary lay, completely exhausted, beneath a shelter of blankets near the base of the cliff and between two bowlders.

"Prairie Flower rode fast and long," said the chief; "she is a brave squaw—sleep will do good—she will be strong—when sun comes—she can climb the big hill—she can see Apache land where flowers bloom always, and birds sing sweet—she can see her home—War Eagle thinks it will be good—Prairie Flower was wrong—the Evil Spirit comes not—the fast-shooting Rangers are lost in the Bandera Hills—where is the black cloud?—War Eagle sees it not—the sun has come twice—the moon grows small—but he sees it not—Prairie Flower has had bad dreams—she has seen strange things—they come not to the eyes of War Eagle."

Had the chief cast a look above him, two hundred feet, to the low bushes, which bordered the edge of the cliff, he would have seen a sight which would have given the lie to one of his assertions; but it was not to be, and the horrible eyes of Red Trailer glared down upon the camp from the veil of leaves unnoticed.

As War Eagle ceased speaking, Mary half arose and answered him:

"You have taken Prairie Flower from the land of her mother's grave, but she is not discouraged; the Great Spirit loves justice, and He will cause War Eagle to wish he had left Prairie Flower where those she loved lay buried."

"I have dreamed, when I know I did slumber but a moment, and in those dreams have seen rivers of blood."

"I have the Apache warriors fall as withered leaves; I have heard the death-yell of War Eagle."

"The Apache land may be beautiful, but Prairie Flower does not wish to see it."

"Look! the sky grows dark! Is War Eagle ready to sing his death-song? The little birds

have told me he will never see another night—that this is his last, and then the long, dark sleep will come."

"The little birds have forked tongues," responded War Eagle, disdainfully. "Prairie Flower is weak—she has had too much ride—strange sounds are in her ears—strange sights in her eyes."

"You are wrong," exclaimed Mary; "that which is in my eyes, now, is not a strange sight, although I see it when my eyes are closed as well as open. Shall I tell you what I see?"

"Speak," said War Eagle.

"I see the Rangers of Texas," cried Mary, exultingly, as if describing an imaginary scene that gave her fresh hope and courage; "I see them coming like the wind over the prairies on the trail of War Eagle; their mustangs are covered with foam; Eagle Eye Carson and the great Big Foot, are in front; they speak no word, nor look to the right, nor to the left; their eyes are upon the trail below the clattering hoofs; they are pale, worn and wounded; but in their eyes there is a stern determination, that will take them, suffering as they are, to the Rocky Mountains, before they will give up the trail."

"War Eagle, beware! death-yells shall ring around these rocks—which are as hard and devoid of feeling as your heart—from Apache throats! Your bright land of the Pecos will be the land of the dead, and the black cloud shall hover over and smother your spirit, for tearing a poor girl from her mother's grave."

The words of Mary were given in such an earnest, prophetic manner, and there was such a far-away look in her eyes, that even the Apache chief drew back and cast a look toward the east, as if expecting to see the Rangers coming; but, ashamed of having betrayed such weakness, he straightened up boldly, and replied:

"Prairie Flower is sick—the hot sun has burned her head—she flutters and sings, like a bird under the charm of a snake—War Eagle will go to his blanket—the words of Prairie Flower are forgotten—they do not please his ears."

War Eagle stopped to speak a few low words, to a brave seated near the shelter, and then joined a circle of warriors by one of the campfires.

Mary lay down again, provoked at herself for talking as she had, for, if War Eagle had taken her words for the truth, doubtless he would have moved his camp over the river. She was glad he had thought what she said arose from a disordered brain.

Were they really dreams?

No!

She felt sure that Kit and the Rangers were on the trail; but, would they arrive in time!

She could not think that God would allow the red fiends to take her where a life of misery awaited her.

She would try and sleep a part of the night; then, if there was a possibility of eluding the guard, she would steal away from the camp, and hide in the mountains. Better be torn by ravenous beasts than cross the Pecos to be—what?

Oh! God! it was dreadful!

The poor, worn-out maiden soon fell into a deep sleep, and the whole encampment was wrapped in silent gloom, for the Indians, so worn by forced and rapid marching, did not linger about the fires as usual, but sought their blankets early.

When Red Trailer observed from his elevated look-out on the cliff above the camp that all were asleep except the guard, he stole along the verge of the precipice, toward the south side of the mountain, keeping rocks and bushes between him and the Indian sentinel posted at that point.

Crawling and worming himself along like a snake, the maniac finally reached the place where the Apache, seated upon a rock, on the edge of the steep declivity, was calmly smoking his pipe, holding both hands over the bowl of the same to hide the fire from being seen, and gazing in unconcern over the dark abyss.

One quick bound and the madman was at his back; the next instant his left hand clasped the throat of the brave, and the right descended, burying a long knife to the hilt in the Apache warrior's heart.

A spirt of hot blood, a horrible, gurgling sound, a struggle, a writhing of sinewy limbs, and the dead brave was hurled with a giant's strength, born of insanity, far out over the steep, and, descending through the air, struck upon the rocks far below with a dull thud, and was dashed into a mangled mass.

The clenched hands of Red Trailer were raised above his head, and a low laugh issued from between his grating teeth.

With the same crouching, creeping manner he made his way to the north side of the mountain, and the other sentinel, left to overlook the plain, went flying over into the dark depths, a blood-stained, mangled corpse, with no death-howl passing his lips to warn his brothers in the camp that danger hovered above them.

Returning to his former position of observation, he proceeded some two hundred paces to the east among the rough bowlders, and then,

by a narrow path, made his way carefully as a mountain-cat down to the plain below, and just inside of the guard line of the Apache camp.

He had noted the position of each of the sentinels before darkness had hidden them from his view, and now lay, concealed by the low bushes and gloom, until the change of guard, for even in his madness there was method and calculation more than most sane men would have exercised under the same circumstances.

Hour after hour passed, and the madman sat as silent and immovable as any of the huge rocks by which he was surrounded.

The moon, clouded and hazy, rolled up into mid-heaven.

There came a rustling tramp through the long grass and brush; dark forms glided like specters past the hiding-place of the crouching man.

Silently they went along the guard line; a few low sounds reached his ear; he knew they were relieving the sentinels upon the plain, and that two braves, fresh from sleep, would soon come up the winding path to take the places of those whose mangled remains now lay upon the jagged rocks at the foot of the cliff.

Red Trailer then returned up the mountain path, and turning to the south, secreted himself behind a boulder, directly in the trail the Indian must follow to reach the point of look-out.

He must work quickly to make away with this one, and reach the other side of the mountain before the relief discovered the absence of his brother brave.

He heard the approach of feet in the long grass and braced himself for a spring; the dark form of the Indian passed his hiding-place, and with the strength of a dozen men in his frame, he threw himself upon the brave and let out his life-blood upon the rocks.

Once more a human form was hurled far out over the dizzy height, and went crashing into a shapeless mass upon the rocks below; once again the more than wizard laugh broke from between the tightly-closed teeth, and the madman sprang along over the path to the point where the other Indian was in search of one he would never find in this world.

The warrior was just turning back, having passed the place selected by War Eagle for observation, and not seeing the sentinel at his post was in search of him, when Red Trailer, approaching in the darkness, was mistaken for the brave which he was looking for, and the Apache walked to meet him, saying:

"Lone Wolf stops not at the north rock—why does he go on strange trails? Are his eyes heavy that he walks to open them?"

These were the last words ever uttered by the Indian, for, as they left his lips, his throat was clasped as in a vise by the hand of an avenger; just as the warning yell was about to burst from his mouth, for he had recognized who was springing at him, in the partial darkness, but too late.

The flash of steel left no life behind it; the mountain was free of the red demons, and Red Trailer was its master, with none to crawl upon him from behind; for there was but one path up, and that but narrow and easily defended by a resolute man against a hundred.

Now he was at liberty to carry out his plans, so suited to his maniac mind.

The buckskin straps and belts, which supported arms and paint-bag, were torn from the Indians, previous to throwing them over the steep side of the mountain; these were taken by the madman to the first position he had occupied as a look-out upon the camp below, and cut into stout thongs, which he secured about his person, and once more stole down the path to the plain.

Commencing at the base of the cliff, he accomplished what would have been a difficult feat for half a dozen scouts like Big Foot Wallace, and which his madness aided in him.

He crawled like a snake upon each Apache sentinel, and with one powerful blow of his fist knocked them senseless. Each was then bound and gagged; then one by one they were taken up the narrow path to the edge of the cliff over the camp, and secured together. This accomplished without disturbing any of the sleeping warriors, Red Trailer now scouted through the Indian camp to the shelter of Mary, and taking her unconscious form in his arms, just as she was, rolled in her blankets, he bore her sleeping form tenderly up the steep hill by the narrow rock-blocked trail, and laid her, still in profound slumber, upon the soft grass.

The maniac stood with folded arms, panting with exertion, gazing down triumphantly upon the twelve Apaches, bound hand and foot, upon the sward; their black, snake-like eyes—they had recovered consciousness—were filled with superstitious horror as they gazed upon the madman, and would have sung their death-songs had the gags permitted them to do so.

The Indians were placed in a semicircle, reclining upon a bank where all were in full view of each other, as they recovered from the stunning blows inflicted by the Red Trailer, which had in most of them bruised and broken the skin, through which the blood was flowing.

There was in the look and bearing of the maniac an exultation which took away a por-

tion of the maddened expression imprinted upon his face.

Wildly, with impatient strides, the insane ranchero walked up and down the edge of the cliff, at times gazing down upon the Apaches with a fierce scowl of hatred, which, as he turned toward his captives, changed to that same low, horrible laugh that has been before mentioned, and which would cause a tremor of dread to run through the frames of the bound guard, who closed their eyes, expecting the death-blow, every time the madman came near their circle.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CLOUD LOWERS.

MARY turned uneasily in her blankets, moans broke from her lips, and her eyes opened; the sky and the rocks above her caused astonishment.

Where was she?

Her shelter must have blown down, she thought. Springing to a sitting position, her eyes fell upon her maniac father, and the bound Apaches just below where she lay.

In great wonderment her looks wandered out upon the plain far beneath her, and she realized that she was on the mountain.

That she had been borne there by her father was evident; no one but he within her gaze was free of limb.

Did he know that she was his daughter? There was no look in his glaring eyes to tell her.

Mary held out her hands pleadingly toward him, calling him—"Father!"

The same fixed gaze met hers.

Tears of agonizing sorrow started from her eyes at the pitiful sight of her mad parent. Would it not have been better if he had been killed when her mother was?

Would it not have been better had she also been butchered, along with the only friends she had upon earth?

Mary, for the moment, forgot Kit, and then the Indian captives lying bound below her led her to wonder if the Rangers were not near. Was it not they who had brought the Indians from the camp of War Eagle? Surely her father could not have accomplished such a desperate feat alone?

How came her father on the mountain? He must have ridden like the wind to have arrived upon the heels of the war-party.

Had he warned the Rangers, and brought them on the trail?

This seemed most reasonable to her, and led her to think that the Rangers were hiding away on the mountain, waiting for a favorable opportunity to pounce upon the sleeping warriors below; and still, if it was so, when would they have as good a chance as the present, when the savages were weakened by the absence of those braves who were bound before her?

Mary now bent her gaze upon her father, and as she was thinking of bygone days in her happy home, a song which she was wont to sing to her parents came to her mind, and the next moment broke in low sweet tones from her lips, as it had a hundred times before at her father's request.

Wild Will was some distance away, his face turned upon the plain below, but, as the familiar melody reached him, he sprang toward his daughter.

Her eyes met his, and her song continued. The repulsive, maddened look in his face softened, and at the close of the first verse he was sobbing like a child at her feet, and Mary was holding his poor battered hot head to her bosom, smoothing out his tangled hair, still warbling the song, tears streaming down her own cheeks and mingling with those of her crazed parent.

As the song ended, the Red Trailer looked up into the face of his daughter, who bent down and kissed his hot brow, uttering the single word:

"Father."

"Mary, Mollie!" came to her ears in the low, loving tone as of old, and William Halliday was himself.

They gazed tearfully into each other's eyes, and it was a moment of unmeasurable happiness to both poor tortured brains; but only for a moment, for a wild yell, the danger-signal of the Apaches, rung up the mountain from the camp below, as bright rays of light spread over the eastern horizon.

The Apaches had discovered the absence of the captive and the guard!

Wild Will sprang to his feet, shaking like an aspen; his eyes glared again in madness, and his teeth gritted horribly, as he bounded down among his captives, and examined each of the cords that bound them.

Mary, disheartened and discouraged, turned her gaze toward the rising sun, the only point from which she could expect relief, for she reasoned that if the Rangers were near they would, some of them have informed her, and not left her with her insane father.

What's that which is outlined against the blood-red disk of the God of Day? She shades her eyes with both hands.

"Thank God!"

It burst from her lips—for she is not dreaming—now—she sees!

Far away in the east, gilded by the sun's rays, which shine like a halo of glory around them, are coming the Rangers. War Eagle's black cloud, which she threatened him with, comes in the bright glare of the sunrise!

A cry of delight breaks from the sweet lips of the long-suffering girl. She feels that she is almost free—that she will once more tread the flowery banks of the clear Medina, and kneel at her mother's grave.

Below, in the Apache camp all is confusion; it is a mystery none can solve; they cannot see the face of the Red Trailer peering through the bushes above them; they cannot understand, or account for, the absence of the white squaw, and the whole guard.

War Eagle himself has lost his sagacity; the warning of Prairie Flower runs through his mind, and seems in all its gloomy details to hover over them.

The chief at last calls his braves about him. They huddle in a confused mass, near the shelter, where Mary had reposed; the superstition inspired by the madman, and the warning of the dying chief, Black Hawk, which has been so far held in check through respect for War Eagle, now bursts forth; but by a quick, authoritative command, and unquailing glance into the eyes of those he addresses, they become silent, and half a dozen braves, by his order, rush up the mountain path, as nothing has been seen or heard of the two sentinels posted upon the high look-outs, although they have been recalled by a signal whoop from the chief.

The eager braves do not climb the path a dozen strides before an avalanche of heavy fragments of rock come crashing and tearing down among them, as the madman hurls them, himself screened from view by the bushes and boulders.

Yells of astonishment and pain follow, and those not crushed by the boulders return to their chief, deserting quickly the dangerous path.

The eyes of all the Indians now turn up the mountain side where they know must be hidden the power which has taken their braves, who were on guard, so mysteriously from their posts.

Red Trailer returns to his post of observation and gazes through the bushes. He sees that the eyes of the whole Apache war-party are fixed earnestly upon the top of the cliff, where, were it not for the fringe of brush, himself and captives would be in view; for from the path along the ridge in which he stands the mountain runs up steep as a house-roof, but from its rocky surface it was not difficult to climb.

The features of Wild Will light up with hellish glee: his time for vengeance has come!

The maniac, with one bound, is in among his red captives. He cuts one warrior loose from the circle, and gathering the long scalp-lock in one hand, and the belt of the savage in the other, he braces himself to advantage, and hurls the living red-man far out over the fringe of bushes, and over the gaping crowd of warriors below.

One long, piercing yell of horror and terrible, deathly fear, springs from the doomed Apache, bursting away the gag, as he whirls over and over, and then, descending like a meteor, is dashed upon the jagged rocks before the appalled band below.

Another and another wild yell, and another brave whirls over the cliff, cuts the air, and strikes the rocks with a sickening thud, spattering blood upon the Apache braves below, who are paralyzed with the dreadful sight, and who, as yet, know not what hellish power is hidden from them by the brush fringe, from which their comrades are hurled to a horrible doom.

Their eyes and attention are riveted, with dread anticipation, upon the cliff-top, and they do not see the greater and more immediate danger to themselves in the rear, until the dull, rumbling thunder of clattering hoofs draws their eyes suddenly to the north, and a sight is before them which drives the horror of the cliff from their minds, and spurs them to quick movements for self-defense.

A hundred of their deadliest foes, the Comanches, are coming toward them, with arrows already fitted to bows!

As the Apaches turn their faces to the plain, the wild war-whoop from a hundred savage throats breaks forth upon the morning air. The superstitious dread of horror brought forth by the unknown foe of the mountain, vanished at the sight of known and mortal enemies.

War Eagle is himself once more, and his bold voice rings out clear and loud as a trumpet.

"Warriors of the Pecos! The Comanches come—let them not see our backs—let your lances and arrows drink their blood—keep your eyes on the dogs of the north—show them how Apaches fight—how Apaches die."

The answering war-cry of the Apaches burst out bold and brave as they dashed behind the rocks and trees to defend their camp. On came the Comanches, like an overwhelming storm, and clouds of arrows filled the air.

Down went a number of Comanches at the first charge—the Apaches retreating to the

very rock wall which formed the mountain base.

Right up to within thirty feet of the rock charged the Comanches, their fierce cries filling the air with echoes, when down crashing through their thickly-pressed ranks, crushing men and horses to the earth, came immense bowlders hurled from the high above.

While the battle raged below, and her father was hurling bowlders of rock with a Titanic strength upon the Indians, Mary—seeing the Rangers coming at a wild gallop, their rifles ready for work—sprung up the rocks far above her former position, and tearing a portion of her tattered calico dress away, waved the same in the air, and had the pleasure of seeing each and every *sombrero* of the gallant little band of heroes waved in return.

The charge of the Comanches was met with such a murderous fire from the Apaches, together with the unaccountable carnage from the stones thrown down upon them, that they were compelled to draw off; and as they did so another surprise awaited them.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

KIT'S CRACK SHOT.

THE Rangers, under Big Foot and Kit, scattered out in a line, were not a thousand yards away as the Comanches began to fall back.

The dreaded Sharp's rifles began to send many on the long trail. Soon the wild Texas yell burst on their ears, and before they could get in order to charge upon their new foes, volley after volley hurtled through their disorganized ranks, and they were forced to retreat toward the mountain, followed by the Rangers.

Between the two fires from Apaches and Rangers, they soon became desperate, and huddling together, with terrible yells they urged their mustangs along the base of the mountain, and escaped to the open prairie to the north, close pressed at a six-shooter charge.

The leaden balls hurtled through their ranks; war-whoops, death-howls, revolver-shots, and the victorious cries of the Texans filled the air, until the Rangers turned their horses, glutted with slaughter, toward the mountain again.

As the Rangers galloped into the camp, a score of Apaches were in the saddle, War Eagle at their head, ready to escape to their hunting-grounds over the Pecos.

The Texans dashed in among the Apaches, their yells ringing up the mountain-side, their revolvers rattling as ever.

In vain did War Eagle strive to keep the few warriors that were left to him together; they fled upon all sides, while the chief caused his horse to spring clear from the struggling men, and cast his eyes up the mountain-side, to behold Mary waving the shred of her dress in encouragement to the Rangers.

Maddened at the sight, he urged his mustang toward the mountain path, and leaping from the animal's back, sprung up the narrow defile to the cliff above.

The chief was but half-way to the mountain-top before he was discovered by Kit, who guessed his purpose, and bounded in pursuit.

Up clambered the Apache chief, while Red Trailer was dancing with hideous glee at the sight of the combat below, and did not notice the approach of War Eagle.

Kit's heart was in his throat; a horrible fear filled his breast as he clutched his rifle and ran up the rocky path.

War Eagle bounded like an enraged panther from rock to rock, and seized Mary, who was paralyzed with fear, in his arms, and her piercing shriek filled the ears of Kit and her father.

The madman gazed in wonder at the bounding form of the Apache chief, then clutching one of the captive braves, he launched him out over the cliff, and again there rung through the morning air that fierce, revengeful laugh.

War Eagle pressed the terrified form of Mary to his heart, and a look behind showed him Kit in fast pursuit; he knew his moments were numbered, and resolved that the white squaw should die with him.

The Apache chief and his trembling captive—from whose breast all hope had departed—reached the opposite side of the mountain; they stood upon the verge of the lofty cliff, and the Pecos river was in plain view.

War Eagle waved his hand and addressed Mary:

"War Eagle has told Prairie Flower she would see the Pecos—look quick—her eyes will soon sleep—they will never open—War Eagle has said Prairie Flower shall be his squaw—War Eagle never lies—she will go on the long trail—she will die with War Eagle—she will be his squaw beyond the stars. Come!"

As the chief spoke the last word he cast a look of hatred, triumph and desperation over his shoulder toward Kit, who stood appalled upon the rocks in the rear.

The arm of War Eagle was raised from the waist of Mary to wave in derision at the scout. That moment was his last. With a movement like a flash of light, taking advantage of the re-

moval of the savage arm from her he loved, in such deadly peril, his rifle sprung to a poise, and the same instant belched forth its messenger of death.

War Eagle reeled; strove to grasp Mary in his embrace as the death-cry left his lips; his form swayed back and forth; a stream of blood spurted from his breast, and down, down from the dizzy height dashed the body of the Apache chief.

Mary fainted with fear and weakness. The arm of the chief struck her as he fell, and she sunk down, and slipped slowly over the fearful height, unconscious of danger. Her dress dragged over the rough-pointed rocks; her fair form must soon be a mangled mass of humanity.

"Great God! save her," prayed Kit, on bended knee, as his eyes closed after the shot.

Kit stands now with the great agony-sweat in beads upon his forehead; his limbs quiver; his lips mutter strange sounds; he drops to the ground and crawls on hands and knees toward the fatal rock; he is very weak; his eyes have a horrible, desperate stare in them.

Slowly the worn, wounded scout creeps over the rocks; his eyes are riveted with an unearthly glare upon the spot where Mary had last stood; he gasps for breath.

A breeze comes in light puffs up the height; a ragged shred of calico is blown for a moment above the cliff; the scout sees the fluttering dress, and bounds like a mountain goat to the very verge of the precipice.

His prayer is heard!

A portion of the maiden's dress has caught on a point of ragged rock, and the beautiful form hangs over the brink, with but a few threads between life and death.

The scout's heart is in his throat, as, with a grasp of iron, he seizes Mary's arm and drags her to his side on the cliff, and with rapture untold the poor girl awakens to realize that she is saved—saved by the man whom she loves more than she does all else in the world.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE END OF THE TRAIL.

WHEN Mary's joy, at the safety of herself and Kit, was over, her first thought was of her poor father, and she glanced nervously around to see if he was near; but the madman had gone, dashing, as before, on the trail of the flying redskins, his vengeance still unsatiated.

"When he finds you are no longer a captive he will return, Mary; he will come back to—"

"Where, Kit? Remember we have no home now," interrupted Mary, sadly, while the pearly tears dimmed her beautiful eyes.

"Pardon me, Mary, for bringing up painful memories, but when this vengeful fever has burned out, he will come back to the grave of those he loved."

"My mother's grave! yes, I have no mother now—our home and all are gone—gone forever."

"That home, once so happy, where dwelt Will Halliday and his lovely family, is in ashes, Mary; but there is a ranch on the Medina that has no rose to brighten its hearthstone. To that home I would transplant her who bears the name of Mary, and whom the Comanches have called the Rose of the Medina: what say you, little girl?" and Kit's eyes shone with a tenderness the maiden had never seen in them before, and in the face turned up to meet his earnest gaze, the scout read his answer before the lips parted with the words:

"Thy home shall be my home, thy creed my creed."

"Be ther howly Moses, Mither Kit, it's givin' up huntin' rid divils, yez hev, to be afther catchin' a angil in pittycots. Begorra, but yez 'ave as mooch taste as meself. Yer humbil sarvint, me leddy, an' ther blissin' of ther Howly Virgin rist upon yez," and Larry sprung from his panting horse and made an awkward bow to Mary, who said pleasantly, though she failed to remember having met the Irishman before:

"And you are one whom I have to thank as a brave defender who came to my rescue. God bless you, brave Ranger," and she held forth her hand, which Larry grasped as tenderly as he would a butterfly.

Before the Irishman could reply the Rangers came up, Big Foot in the lead, and throwing themselves from their steeds, they gave three rousing cheers for the Rose of the Medina, after which they gathered around and congratulated the maiden upon her rescue.

Observing that Mary seemed haggard and worn out, Big Foot said, kindly:

"Now, Miss Mollie, we have yer safe, we want yer to jist take a rest fer ter-day and ter-night, an' we'll guard yer from harm; then we'll start on ther back trail, an' if I don't mistook we'll git through all right to the Medina. Come, boys, let's make wicky-up fur ther Rose o' ther Medina."

The Rangers and Larry then went to work with a will, and soon had a safe and pleasant retreat for the maiden; after which they dress-

ed their own wounds, cooked and ate a hearty meal, and having placed two sentinels to keep guard, threw themselves upon their blankets to seek the rest they so much needed.

With the first peep of day the small party started upon the back trail, laden down with trophies found in the Indian camps, and driving before them a large herd of horses, which had belonged to both Comanche and Apache.

Without adventure worthy of notice, they at length reached the Medina, arriving in sight of the ruined home of Will Halliday just before sunset.

That Mary might kneel alone at the grave of her mother, Kit delicately suggested that she should ride on ahead, when they came within a few miles of the Medina's bank, and thanking him with a sad smile, she urged her mustang, the one that had belonged to the Apache chief, into a gallop, and soon came in sight of the clump of timber that concealed the last resting-place of those so dear to her, who had been hurled into eternity by a death so horrible.

But suddenly the maiden drew rein, and wheeled her horse as though about to fly back over the prairie; but an instant only did she hesitate, and then she rode again forward toward the grave at the foot of the large post-oak.

That which had startled the maiden was a large mustang, bridled and saddled, and standing under the shadow of the trees; that which had caused her to again ride on was the form of a man, crouching beside the ashes-covered grave under the post-oaks.

Cautiously Mary rode into the timber, and springing to the ground, crept softly toward the spot where crouched the form—a form she recognized in spite of its tattered clothing, paint-and-blood-begrimed face, unkempt hair and wild appearance.

Nearer and nearer she crept until within a few feet of the man, whose glaring eyes were bent upon the ground, as though to penetrate the earthy covering over the triple dead that lay beneath.

"Father!"

In an instant the man was upon his feet, and he stood like a hunted wolf, his ears bent in the act of listening, his eyes wildly flashing.

"Father!"

Again came the soft sweet voice to the man's ears, and he trembled violently, while his teeth were set, and his hands were clinched until the nails sunk into the palms.

"Father!"

The man started, and his hand was raised painfully to his forehead, while words of deepest anguish broke from the white, blood-stained lips:

"Am I mad, that I know not where I have heard that voice before? Oh God! am I mad?" and the man glanced nervously around him, yet his eye fell not on the trembling form and white face of the maiden.

"Father!"

"Oh, God! it is my Mary calls, and I must fly to her," almost shrieked the man, springing forward, a wild light in his bloodshot eyes.

"Father—I am here—here!" and Mary threw herself before him and grasped him wildly around the neck.

With giant strength, such as only the mad possess, he tore loose her hold and held her out at arm's length, while he gazed fixedly into her face.

"Father, I am your Mary; do you not know me?"

"Think, father! Our home, once happy, is gone, and we are all that are left—we are all."

"Your mother, girl, where is she?" hoarsely said the madman.

"She is dead, alas!"

"Yes, she is dead; I remember now, and her grave is here! Oh God! I am no longer mad! I can think now, for reason comes back to this poor, aching, whirling brain; the hideous nightmare is ended, and I awake to all that I have lost. Yes, I remember now the red fiends and their devilish work—I remember all; we are left, but they lie there—ha! before my vision come scenes of wild carnage, ringing death-yells, mad rides and fiendish revenge—ay, my hands are torn, my breast cut and blood-stained, and the warm life-current is dripping from my gashed arms—yes, it comes back now like a dream of death—my woes drove me mad—my madness drove me to revenge—Mary, your mother, ay, all who lie there, are avenged."

The poor man covered his face with his hands, as though to shut out some fearful sight, and a shudder shook his tall form, and throwing himself upon the grave, he burst into a flood of tears.

Kneeling beside him, Mary placed her hand upon his bowed head, and soon his violent grief passed away, and, as the sound of approaching hoof-strokes broke on his ear, William Halliday arose to his feet, his face calm, the wild glare gone from his eyes, and his brain no longer on fire with the fever of revenge, for reason had returned to its throne, and in the dignified man who greeted the Rangers as they rode up, they no longer recognized the one who had so lately been known as the Red Trailer.

THE END.

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